Polyhedron®

NEWSZINE

NOVEMBER

89

RPGA® NETWORK

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Conventions

Winter Fantasy, January 7-9
Milwaukee, WI
Don't miss the RPGA® Network's own annual gaming bash, which will be held in Milwaukee's downtown Hyatt Regency hotel. Join our very special guests Bill (don't spell my name wrong) Slavicsek, Jim (hand me that video) Lowder, and Bruce (look at them choppers) Nesmith for our Saturday seminar series. Walk through the dealer's room. Try your hand at feats of derring-do over occupied France in our weekend-long DAWN PATROL® game challenge. Vie for the coveted moose in our Tom Wham game-a-thon. Of course, we'll have sanctioned tournaments for the AD&D® game, Star Wars, and Shadowrun at Feature, Masters, Grand Masters, and Benefit levels. Living City activities will include a tournament, Chemcheaux, Land Office, and equipment auction. Pre-registration before November 30th is $15 ($10 for judges who run three or more sessions). Special convention rates are available at the Hyatt (414-276-1234) and the Hotel Wisconsin (414-271-4900) be sure to mention Winter Fantasy. For information or to pre-register write: Winter Fantasy, P.O. Box 515, Lake Geneva, WI 53147. Judges wanted for Network tournaments—that means **you!** Events welcome!

RuneQuest-Con, January 14-16
Columbus, MD
Just as the name implies, a convention devoted mostly to Chaosium/Avalon Hill's RuneQuest. The site is the Columbia Inn. Events will include many RuneQuest, Call of Cthulhu, Pendragon, and Empire of the Petal Throne tournaments; a 75-person Glorantha live-action game; seminars on Glorantha, Tekumel, and Cthulhu; a rare-merchandise auction; a storytelling contest; live-action Trollball; dealers; and a lot more. Guests of Honor include Greg Stafford, Ken Ralston, Sandy Petersen, Michael O'Brien, and David Hall. We're still looking for more events. Registration is probably $30 for the weekend plus $10 for the live-action game. Please contact: David Cheng, 313 East 85th Street Apt. 2C, New York, NY 10028; (212)472-7752.

Kapcon '94, January 22-24
Kapiti Coast, New Zealand
New Zealand's one and only Network-supported convention, held on the beautiful Kapiti Coast. Games include a three-round AD&D Open tournament, Paranoia, Battletech, MERP, Shadowrun, and lots more. Food available on site. Entry is only $30 ($45 NZ), with a 20% discount for Network members. Write: Kapcon '94, P.O. Box 2093, Raumati Beach, New Zealand.

Celtic Con, January 22
Elkhart, IN
The Regiment, MAGI, and Celtic Miniatures will host this convention featuring historical miniatures events and Network tournaments. The door fee is $5. For information. please contact: MAGI, 106 1/2 West Lexington, Elkhart, IN 46516; (219)294-8990.

Genghis Con XV, February 18-20
Denver, CO
The Denver Gamers Association presents Genghis Con XV at the Denver Marriott Southeast, I-25 and Hampden, in Denver. This is the biggest gaming convention in the Rocky Mountain region, with a large variety of events including the nationally known Puffing Billy tournament, Network events, Kingmaker, Civilization, Battletech, Vampire, Traveller, Car Wars, and various miniatures and computer events. Also featured are specialized auctions, a miniature painting contest, a live role playing event, dealer's area, and seminars and demonstrations. Guests of honor to be announced. Pre-registration is $15 for the weekend. For more information contact: The Denver Gamers Association, P.O. Box 440058, Aurora, CO 80044. For accommodations contact: The Denver Marriott Southeast at (303)758- 7000.

Visioncon '94, February 24-26
Springfield, MO
join us for RPGs, board games, miniatures games, art show, costume contest, dealer's room, video room, and more. Persons interested in Network events, especially judging, write: Visioncon, Attention Game Coordinator, P.O. Box 1415, Springfield, MO 65801-1415, or call (417)866-4099.

Egyptian Campaign '94, February 25- 27
Carbondale, IL
This event will be held in the Renaissance and Roman rooms of Southern Illinois University's Student Center in Carbondale. Games include Network AD&D and MARVEL SUPER HEROES tournaments, plus many other board and war games. Also featured are a game auction, miniatures contests, and guest speakers. Pre-registration is $10. For information send a SASE to: Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, 3rd Floor Student Center, Carbondale, IL 62901-4425, or call Joel T. Nadler at (618)529-4630.

Mustering of the Regiment, March 5
Elkart, IN
The Regiment Gaming Club, MAGI, and Celtic Miniatures will be present this game day at Elkart's McNaughton Park. The entry fee is $5. We will offer both historical miniatures and Network role playing tournaments. Interested parties can contact: MAGI, 106 1/2 West Lexington, Elkhart, IN 46516; or call (219)294-8990.

Concentric, March 11-13
Rosemont, IL
Come to the center of the universe! Concentric circle presents the new midwest gaming convention in the Chicago area. We offer 16 all-new Network events including Feature, Benefit, Masters, Grand Masters, Chill, Call of Cthulhu, Torg, Star Wars, Vampire, the GAMMA WORLD® game, and visual Living City. There also will be lots of miniature events, board games, and additional role playing events. Visit our art show and auction. We'll have a dealer's room with lots of demos and new products, plus a sumptuous banquet and a blood drive tied to our Vampire event. Concentric will be held at the Ramada O'Hare in Rosemont, IL. Pre-registration is $12 until February 1st, 1994. For information write: Concentric, 114 Euclid, P.O. Box 287, Park Ridge, IL 60068.

Little Wars '94, March 31-April 2
Rosemont, IL
This miniatures-oriented gaming weekend, sponsored by the Historical Miniatures Gaming Society (HMGS) Midwest, will be held at the Ramada Hotel O'Hare in Rosemont. Admission is $12 for the weekend. HMGS members and event judges receive a discounted admission. Little Wars will be held in conjunction with Spring Fantasy Revel, which features AD&D tournaments and other role playing events. Fees also are $12 for the weekend. For an additional $3 you can attend both events. Onsite lodging is available at a special convention rate. For more information write: Jeffrey Hammerlund, 107 West Chicago St., Algonquin, IL 60102.

This Just In

Tournament results for the following conventions were recorded at HQ between June 30th, and August 30th, 1993:

Another Con 3	Boggle Con
Capcon 16 (OH)	Cap Con IX (IL)
Castle Con 6	Configuration
Day of Games	Demi-Con IV
Eve Con	Games Caucus II
Game Night	Grand Game Con
Green Con '93	I Con XII
Impact 2.5	July's Joust
Michicon	Origins
Quin Con 8	Rolecon '93
Spring Con	Summer Games Day
Thunder Con	Tri-con IV
Wyvercon '93	

If you played a Network event at a convention not on this list, check with the convention organizer to see if the results have been sent to HQ.

Note that conventions run in **Europe** and **Australia** do not appear on this list.

Attention Living City Players

The following notice has been posted throughout Ravens Bluff:

Temporal Criminals Beware!
It has come to our attention that certain individuals with access to illegal forms of sorcery have contrived to repeat certain adventures within the city, thus defrauding ordinary citizens of their fair share of wealth and honor. Meddling with the city's future by repeating and altering its past is a crime that shall not be tolerated! Penalties for offenders shall be assessed by decree of the lords of the city.

Charles Oliver O'Kane, Lord Mayor
Tordon Sureblade, Lord Chancellor

Translation: You can play Network events for points only once. If a convention offers a scenario you've already played, judge it instead.

Repeating a Living City event is an even bigger no-no. If you play a Living City event twice, your character gets no treasure and no experience for the second session; you get no Network points for the second session. This applies even if you use a different character for the repeat session—playing a scenario with advanced knowledge is cheating.

Right now, HQ is polling the membership for ideas on how to deal with persistent offenders.

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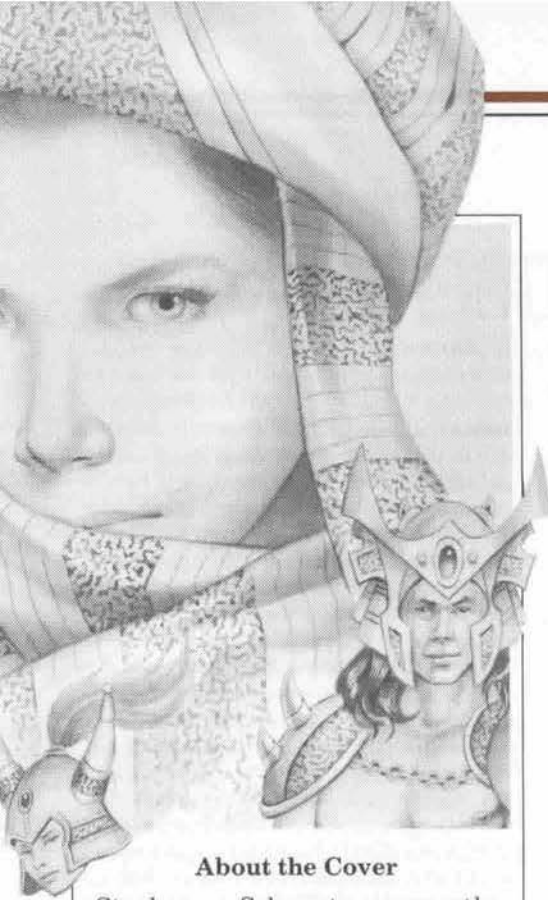

About the Cover

Stephen Schwartz expertly rendered his vision of the action in The Ugly Stick, this month's featured adventure.

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If your mailing label reads "Exp 11.93"
this is your last issue.
Renew today!

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SPECIAL FEATURE

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A resort for the wealthy and powerful becomes a very dangerous place. It's up to a band of stalwart adventurers to defeat a beauty who threatens to make the resort's guests homely and the resort's owners poor.

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The Everwinking Eye

Treasures of the Vast, Part Two

by Ed Greenwood

Oh, there's always treasure, lad. Finding it's the first problem—and taking it away from whomever or whatever's guarding it is the second. Then ye have the third and worst problem: stopping the rest of the Realms from straightaway taking it away from ye.

Ondreth Blackshards, merchant-captain of the Inner Sea and master of the coaster The Mermaid of Scardale; said to a deck hand,
Year of the Worm

Our treasure tour of the Vast continues, from Dragon Falls onward through the alphabetical list.

Dragon Falls

This village is built on a crag overlooking the only large waterfall on the Fire River. The site was once the lair of a powerful red dragon, Halarglautha "Firewings." The adventurers who slew Halarglautha destroyed the lair with their spells and dug up most of the dragon's large hoard of mixed riches. But there are persistent rumors that they missed much and that wealth still lies buried under the cottages and gardens of the village. (Adventurers who show up with shovels won't be welcomed). There is also an old local belief that the dragon made its lair here rather than on a taller, more easily defended peak in the nearby Troll Mountains. It knew that dwarven storage-caverns full of gold were under the crag, and it hoped to trick, bribe, or otherwise persuade smaller creatures to dig down to the riches and bring them up.

Elvenblood Pass

This rugged mountain pass carries the High Trail through the mountains between Ravens Bluff and Sarbreenar. It has always had a reputation for danger because of its frequent rockfalls, hunting stirges, wyverns, and other mountain-dwelling predators. More than a dozen narrow ravines branch away from the main pass. All of these are thickly cloaked in trees and undergrowth. Bandits and many flightless monsters make their lairs in the ravines. Rumor insists that treasures looted from unfortunate travelers are buried in the ravines or just stuffed into fissures in the rocks. Legends also tell of at least two great caches.

One is the coffin of Naer Tlarra, a long-dead human wizard. The sepulcher is said to contain his spell books, wands, a staff, and a 12-pointed magical crown that allows the wearer to use the powers of all magical rings placed on its spires as if they were worn directly, overcoming the usual limit of wearing only two rings at one time. The tales say that a ring rests on each point, and at least two of them possess rare and unusual powers.

No tale hints that Naer is undead. He lived almost a thousand years ago in what is now Chessenta. His 10-foot-long stone coffin is said to be guarded by several layers of spells and guardian creatures. It is probably also buried or overgrown.

The other great treasure reputed to be hidden in or near the Elvenblood Pass is the royal treasury of Westgate, stolen from King Glaurauth "the Great" in the days when that city was the northernmost human settlement in the western Inner Sea lands.

The Glaurauth's wizards traced the thieves and gave hot pursuit. The thieves fled by ship to an anchorage at what is now Procampur. From there, they hastily took their spoils north into the mountains, but the court wizards of Westgate slew them one by one with their spells.

Troops from Westgate also followed the thieves and caught up with them somewhere in the pass. The thieves set off avalanches and mounted ambushes, but their pursuers outnumbered them 30 to 1, and the wizards' spell attacks made the outcome inevitable.

The thieves perished, but the spells and the clash of arms did not go unnoticed. A thousand orcs streamed out of the ravines and from caves high above the pass.

The orcs fell upon the victors, and the pass ran red with blood. To this day, travelers can see a grisly relic of one wizard's last stand: He sacrificed his life to power a mighty spell that whirled a dozen orcs 40 feet up into the air and spun them in a circle. The orcs died, and their bodies have long-since crumbled to bone fragments and powder. This debris, however, still circles endlessly above a ledge overlooking the midpoint of the pass.

The forces of Westgate were doomed, but they held out long enough to hide their riches. There were said to be six large strongchests and almost 20 smaller coffers and caskets containing necklaces and gems; a collection of fanciful, filigreed, and jeweled masks; at least four gem-laden crowns, a ceremonial chalice; and a scepter said to have magical powers as well as displaying three rubies all as large as a man's fist.

A wizard found dead at a party thrown by a visiting Cormyrean noble in Ravens Bluff six winters ago was wearing a gem-encrusted mask that sages agree is probably from the court of Westgate. But they all stress that it might not have been part of the stolen royal regalia; many nobles of Westgate had their own impressive masks made. With the changing themes and fashions of the festivals, craftsmen were forever tearing apart masks to make up new ones from the same materials.

Fallentree

This wayside village is located at the meeting of two trails: Blaern's Trail (which links Calaunt with Dead Tree Hollow via Thindlar and Sendrin) and Feldar's Trail (which runs from Fallentree to Mossbridges via Dark Hollow and Highbank Forest).

Fallentree is a place of dark pines and horse farms. In the past, Fallentree was a favorite haunt for brigands. They could hide in any of a dozen pine woods among the rolling hills and swoop down on travelers at full gallop. Or they could fell a tall pine across a road and force caravans to halt and be ambushed.

Many merchants took to avoiding the area altogether, which forced the brigands to ride farther and farther afield. Other merchants banded together into large caravans, hiring small armies of guards. Fallentree became the site of several pitched battles, and many brigand cabals died without leaving anyone alive to know where their loot was hidden.

Small bands of brigands are always forming and dissolving in death or treachery, but all powerful cabals have

Continued on page 30

Notes From HQ

A Charitable Convention

This past GEN CON® Game Fair drew a record number of participants—about 19,000.

There also were a record number of guests, including George Takei, *Star Trek's* Mr. Sulu.

Best-selling author R.A. Salvatore was the Network's Guest of Honor, speaking at the members' meeting and annual breakfast. In addition to many other appearances, Bob was part of a special AD&D® game. Bob role-played Drizzt, his drow hero from *The Legacy, Starless Night,* and other novels. Ed Greenwood served as the DM. And five lucky Network members who donated to our charities were the players.

Other benefit tournaments were run by Ed Stark of West End Games, and Bill Slavicsek and Bruce Nesmith of TSR.

Among the most popular events were our Living City tournaments, *Handful of Dust* by John Rateliff and *Run Free Stockings* by Wayne Straiton and Brian Phillips. Both events oversold, and we scrambled for DMs to accommodate all the players. We will do more Living City activities at next year's Game Fair. Our plans include a Living City Masters and a "Living City Bazaar," where your character can acquire equipment, trade magic items, and pick up juicy rumors.

Children and Dogs

The Network's charities at this Game Fair were the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin and the Okada Guide Dog Program.

The Network has been donating to the Children's Hospital for the past four years for its various treatment programs. The hospital exclusively serves children. All proceeds from the DARK SUN® event *Hope for the Future* by Kevin Melka went to the Children's Hospital.

The Okada Guide Dog Program of Fontana, WI trains dogs to assist the deaf, alzheimer patients, persons prone to seizures, and the elderly. All proceeds from the D&D® game event, *Fluffy Conquers the World* by Rick Reid were given to Okada.

Other donations came from a benefit auction and the Klingon Jail-and-Bail. Among the most noteworthy contributions included a trip to Cruise Con, sponsored by Gary Smith of Ohio.

In addition, the Network club Seekers of the Crystal Monolith, disbanded and voted to give its entire treasury—more than $500—to the Children's Hospital.

All totaled, the Okada Guide Dog Program received $3,000, and Children's Hospital received $7,400.

Thank you to everyone who participated to raise money for these very worthy organizations.

Special Thanks

Tournaments ran smoothly thanks to all of our Network DMs, event coordinators, marshalls, and HQ staff, including—Cheryl Frech, Chris Schon, Norm Ritchie, Skip Williams, Wes Nicholson, Marshall Simpson, Doug Behringer, Scott Douglas, Wayne Straiton, Jeff Eick, Dave Baker, Ted Stadtlander, Tony Dentamaro, Brian Phillips, Clint Heilman, Michael Adamson, Carl Longley, Bill Corey, Denise Rabidou, Evon Fuerst, Mitzi Young, Nicky Rea, Jackie Cassada, Willi Burger, John Dorner, Katy Fitch, Jennie Wright, Carol Clarkson, Keith Polster, Kevin Melka, Brandon Amancio, James Ward, Jean Grey, and Gary Smith.

Farewell and Hello

Longtime Network staffer Skip Williams has moved to TSR's game division as a designer and editor. We wish him well in his new endeavors. Skip, a charter member of the Network, will continue to participate in activities and tournaments.

New to the Network is David Gross, formerly a teacher from Virginia. David is an assistant "SysOp" with GEnie and will help the Network's growth with online programs. He assumes the duties of associate editor of the Newszine and will be in charge of the Network club program. David has been instrumental in helping the Network's growth through GEnie's online conventions. Welcome aboard!

Take Care,

Jean

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The Game Fair In Pictures

The gaming was hot in Milwaukee!

The Ugly Stick

An AD&D game adventure for 4-7 not altogether attractive characters of Levels 1-7

Illustration by Steven Schwartz

by Rembert Parker

Players' Introduction

It just isn't fair—some people grow up charismatic, some people grow up beautiful, and some people grow up attractive both inside and out.

For all your skills and abilities, there are times when you would trade them all for just a little more physical beauty. Many merchants and other folks treat attractive people with more respect and attention, it seems.

Oh, sure, you're not really bad looking. But you don't consider yourself truly dazzling. This week you might have a chance to change all of that.

About two days' journey southwest from here is the famous Poston Plateau Resort. A long-dormant volcano there left behind soil rich with ash and pumice, and to this day hot water rumored to have magical restorative effects bubbles from the ground nearby. As children, some of you made fun of the wealthy old men and women who spent their fortunes on treatments to stay young and attractive. But now you are older and more concerned with your own aging—and now you also have reason to believe there's something to the stories about the plateau after all.

Recently, your party acquired a small chest filled with cheap jewelry. While climbing the stairway to the second floor of an inn, one of you dropped the chest, and the lid split open. While trying to repair it, you noticed that the lid had separated slightly, revealing an old piece of parchment inside. Your rising excitement was rewarded when you unrolled the parchment to find a map to the Poston Plateau—a map which revealed the location of a *wand of beauty!*

You spent all of yesterday dashing from store to store, acquiring the goods that necessary to make the journey and find the wand.

Soon, you'll be off to the plateau.

Notes to the DM™

The map the PCs have is correct—the plateau is home to a *wand of beauty;* it is also the home to a *wand of ugliness!* The two wands were fashioned using lava from the volcano and are virtually

indestructible. The *wand of beauty* can provide one point of Comeliness for each charge expended, but it can be charged only by beating someone with the *wand of ugliness.* Each strike by the *wand of ugliness* provides one charge on the *wand of beauty* and reduces the victim's Comeliness by 1d6 points, though it does no other physical damage.

Comeliness rules are explained at the end of this adventure.

Using the *wand of ugliness* is a chaotic evil act, and continued use eventually changes the wielder's alignment to chaotic evil.

Each strike with the *wand of beauty* adds one point of Comeliness. When a person attains a Comeliness of 18, it requires 20 charges to increase Comeliness another point, so a character with a Comeliness of 18 must expend 20 charges to attain a Comeliness of 19.

The two wands have been discovered and removed from their hiding place by a cleric, Fawn, who is working at the Poston Plateau Resort.

Fawn used the *wand of ugliness* to charge the *wand of beauty*, slowly and secretly increasing her own beauty. To keep others from noticing the changes in her looks, she has learned the disguise nonweapon proficiency. As a result of the repeated use, her alignment has shifted to chaotic evil, but she has become stunningly beautiful.

Once Fawn's Comeliness reached 18, she discovered to her great anger and frustration that she could gain more beauty only by expending 20 charges of the *wand of beauty.* When she was passed over for a promotion at the resort, her frustration boiled over and she began taking her revenge.

The insidious Fawn began sneaking into guests' rooms and hitting them with the *wand of ugliness* to charge her *wand of beauty.* She now makes a lucrative living blackmailing the resort, for the management has been unable to determine why some of its guests are growing uglier, not more beautiful.

History of the Wands

When an evil sorceress created them centuries ago, the wands were thought to be indestructible. However, a group of good wizards and priests worked for months finally to fashion a method for dealing with the foul magic items. They constructed a magical container from the volcano's lava. The container consists of five parts: a sturdy box open on the top, a red velvet cushion with indentations for the wands, a glass lid, and two metal fasteners. When the wands are sealed within the container, all of their effects are immediately reversed. The container is not only indestructible but also sentient—it wants to contain the wands.

The priests and wizards put the wands in the box and buried the box on the plateau—many, many, many years ago. Unfortunately, Fawn undid their work by unearthing the devices.

Visiting The Plateau

When the PCs arrive at the plateau, they can visit the various shops and the resort itself if they wish. Anyone with a Comeliness lower than 13 will be treated politely, but coldly; anyone with a Comeliness lower than 10 will be treated rudely (the lower the Comeliness, the more rude the treatment). The resort caters to the rich and beautiful, and the party members are most likely neither.

Following the map, the party finds a tunnel which leads to a cave. The cave mouth, however, has been crudely hidden with a stack of rocks. The opening leads to a cavern guarded by animal zombies. In the cavern floor is a hole into which Fawn threw the stone tablet that described how to use the neutralizing container. Fawn also accidentally dropped one of the metal fasteners into the hole.

Once she discovered that she could not destroy the container, she took it apart and hid the remaining four pieces in various places on the plateau.

When a PC picks up the fastener and has read the tablet, he or she can hear the other pieces of the container calling out. This effect does not occur if the same person carries one of the wands as well as the container, so Fawn never noticed it. To complete the adventure, the party must assemble the container.

- The box is now in the home of a high-level wizard, Esmerelda, who filled it with soil to plant flowers. The party must persuade her to give it to them.

- The lid is in the bottom of a pool of mud filled with mudmen.

- The velvet holder is buried in a field of tri-flower fronds.

- The second fastener is secreted in the back of a drawer in the plateau security department's office.

Since one of the PCs can hear the pieces calling, the party can recover them in any order. Once the container is reassembled, the bearer can hear the wands calling from Fawn's room; the final encounter is a confrontation with Fawn.

Getting to the Plateau

The PCs can travel to the plateau by any means available to them. Once they reach the mountains, however, they must leave any mounts behind. There is no way to take any land-based mount up the steep cliff.

The Plateau

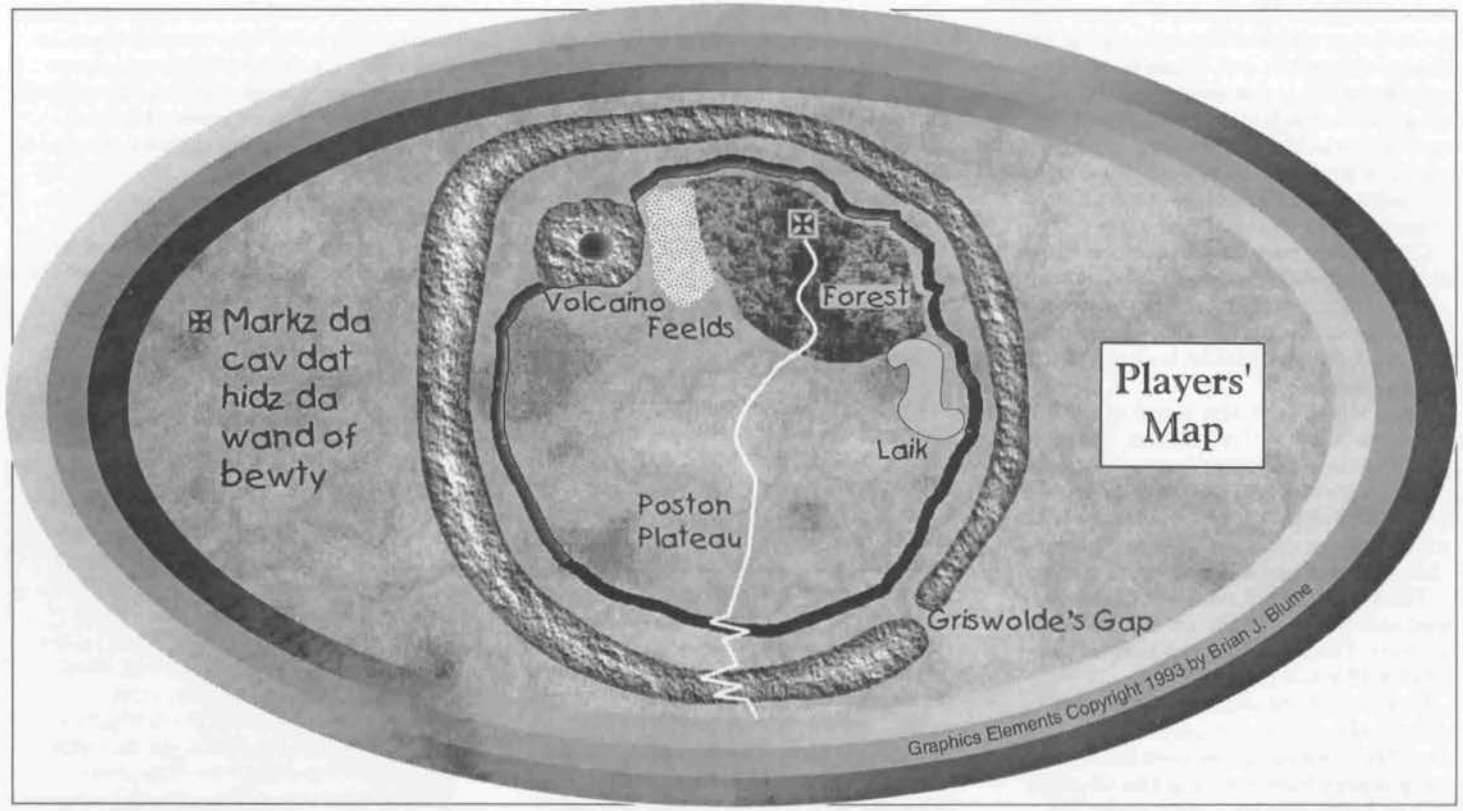
Most of your journey to Poston Plateau was quick and uneventful, but the final two miles were arduous. The mountain trail climbed nearly straight up, and you had to stop for rest several times. With a weary sigh, you round the last curve in the trail and find yourself facing level ground—and an impolite sign:

"Poston Plateau is private property. Visitors are welcome, but only registered guests may stay overnight. The owners accept no responsibility for injury or death resulting from camping in the forest."

The area beyond the sign is beautiful. A cluster of quaint shops sits to your left, with the dormant volcano towering behind. Straight ahead, you see a forest bright with autumn colors. Ahead and to your right is the famous Poston Plateau Resort. Although this land is level, it is ringed on nearly all sides by taller mountains. The only breaks are the path you have just ascended and a small gap in the mountains to your right and slightly behind you. This gap is partially filled by a log cabin floating about 20 feet in the air.

As you look around, a man in well-tailored gray and mauve clothing walks smiling toward you. As he gets closer, the smile disappears and he looks as though he wishes you would as well.

This man is Quincy, one of the resort escorts who would normally show guests around the plateau. After seeing the party, he quickly loses interest in them, particularly if not all of them are very attractive or appear wealthy. He introduces himself, asks if the group has a reservation, and (after assuring



himself that they are not on his list) excuses himself back to his post (a chair in the shade). If the PCs ask for any information, he hints about a tip. At least six silver pieces must be forthcoming or he becomes rude and mutters about people who insist on going places they are not welcome.

If the PCs offer an adequate tip, Quincy tells the party the names of the various shops, but then starts muttering anyway.

Once Quincy takes his leave of the PCs, the party is free to investigate the shops and the resort.

If the PCs walking directly into the forest, Quincy warns them that the forest is dangerous after dark.

DM's Guide to Poston Plateau

Although the shops make different claims, they all have the same price—100 gp minimum a visit. There are extra fees for extraordinary treatments.

Unsoiled Beauty: This shop provides mud treatments alleged to tighten and soften skin. The proprietors are Bertha, Betty, Bobbie, and Sal.

The Springs of Youth: The back rooms of this shop open directly into the hot springs; partitions in the springs allow patrons to bathe privately. A pair of elves, Timster and Kimmie, supervise the shop. Nightly sessions for a full month will restore one point of Constitution lost to age or system shock failure.

Nature's Remedies: A half-elf couple, Cytaren and Bonnieverla, run this shop. They provide special ointment treatments and vitamin regiments from plants they have found in the forest. These help to cure diseases and reverse artificial aging. As a lucrative sideline, they operate as alchemists by night, supplying powders and potions at inflated prices.

Recoveries: Anasteria and her three assistants provide superior makeup, including a two-month supply of the ingredients necessary to look one's best every day. At night, Anasteria teaches the disguise nonweapon proficiency for an extra fee.

Esmerelda's Log Cabin: This cabin floats 20 feet in the air, offering a spectacular view for the 14th level magic user and Esther, her chimp familiar.

The Poston Plateau Resort: This is possibly the area's best (and certainly most expensive) vacation spot. Behind the security wall are areas for horseback riding, swimming and diving, nature walks through a safe but exotic forest, organized sports, daily exercise classes at all levels, and superior dining and accommodations. It caters primarily to the rich and beautiful—power is optional but desirable.

Pricing and Efficacy

There is no guarantee that the treatments in the shops actually work, and the DM™ must set prices to fit the campaign. The suggested price range for restoring lost Constitution at The Spring of Youth is 5,000 for a treatment that is 25% successful. Each additional 1,000 gp spent on treatments increases the chance of success by 10%, and any failed treatment restores lost Constitution only temporarily (1d4 +3 weeks).

The suggested price range for regaining a year of unnatural aging at Nature's Remedies is 8,000 for a base 25% chance of success. Again, each additional 1,000 gp spend on treatment increases the chance of success by 10%.

All payments for exotic services must

be made in full at least a week in advance, giving the proprietors a chance to move the money off the plateau and to a safe place, just in case the customer is dissatisfied.

Into The Forest

The map leads the party into the forest. Note that although they can enter the forest from the resort grounds, surrounding the resort is a fence which cannot be easily passed due to a series of *avoidance* spells cast on it.

Once the PCs enter the forest, it takes them 30 minutes to find the area where the tunnel entrance should be. The entrance has been camouflaged with several logs covered with a pile of large stones and dirt. Three small trees have been transplanted around the stones.

The party can find the entrance to the tunnel in several ways:

- Success with the observation proficiency reveals that the rocks are piled up deliberately.

- Anyone with the agriculture proficiency (or a background in forestry) recognizes that the trees have been transplanted—something very unusual in a normal forest.

- Anyone with the mining proficiency realizes that the stones in the pile were brought here from somewhere else.

- Successful use of direction sense allows a character to follow the map exactly, which leads the character to the pile of stones.

- With a successful die roll, an elf or half elf character can recognize the pile of rocks as a concealed door.

If PCs dig at the pile of rocks, they uncover the cave. If all else fails, a randomly chosen PC can step on a weak spot near the cave and sink into the ground.

Into the Cave

Inside the cave mouth, you find a tunnel that slopes down about 15 feet before leveling off in a circular cavern about 30 feet across. The roof is at most six feet high, but a number of stalactites and an occasional large root cause the ceiling to be as low as four feet in places. There is little doubt that you are in the right place, for in the center of this man-made cave is a four-foot cube of stone. Unfortunately, that is not all that is here.

You see seven gray squirrels, eight orange and white striped tabby cats, one fluffy white dog, four large raccoons, and four big badgers shuffling woodenly toward you.

Fawn used a scroll to animate these undead. Their orders are to attack any who enter the cave.

The creatures fight until destroyed. If turned, they flee to the cavern's outer walls. If they are subsequently attacked, the turning is broken and they fight anew.

Animal Zombies (24): Int Non; AL N; AC 6; MV 4; HD 1+4; hp 8 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6; MR Special; SZ M; ML Special; XP 65 each.

Zombies move slowly and always lose initiative. They are immune to *sleep, charm, hold, death magic,* poisons, and cold-based spells. A vial of holy water inflicts 2-8 points of damage upon a zombie.

When the party examines the cube, they find a 24" square and 6" deep indentation on the front. They also discover that a portion of the top (which weighs nearly a hundred pounds) slides back to reveal an empty compartment about 30" long, 12" wide, and 18" deep. The compartment is empty; this is where the container and the wands were kept.

The indentation marks where a stone tablet describing the container once rested. If the PCs examine the indentation, they find several long scratches in the stone.

If the party members search the cavern, they find a trickle of water coming out of the northwest wall. The water runs through a groove cut into the stone floor and flows into a hole about five feet wide.

If the party investigates the hole, they see that water falls about 30 feet into a pool of mud. There, a flat piece of stone with writing on it juts out of the mud. The party is too far away to tell what the writing says.

If the PC remove the tablet, they see something—perhaps a gem-sparkling at the bottom of the cavity the tablet left in the mud. Even as they watch, the mud quickly fills the cavity after the tablet is moved. However, the PCs can fish out the shiny object by digging quickly in the mud. If the PCs ignore the object, the hole collapses, burying one or more PCs up to their necks in the mud. As they free themselves, one PC's hand closed on a small, metallic object.

The object is one the container's fasteners. The character holding it begins hearing voice faintly calling: "Over here! We're over here!" Any PC who holds the fastener can hear the voices.

The PCs can read the tablet only if they have a light source.

The inscription reads: "Here lie the accursed *wands of beauty* and *ugliness*. They cannot be destroyed, but this container neutralizes them and any mischief they have done. Place the wands in the container, seal it with the two fasteners, and their baneful effects will cease until the wands are freed again. Woe be to any who uses the wands, for they darken the heart.

The Fastener: Examining the piece of metal reveals that it is merely a small clip which might hold together two pieces of material.

The voices the holder hears come from the direction of the resort; from now until the end of the adventure, anyone holding a piece of the container hears the other parts calling out.

As the party returns to the resort with the fastener, the voices diverge and come from several different directions.

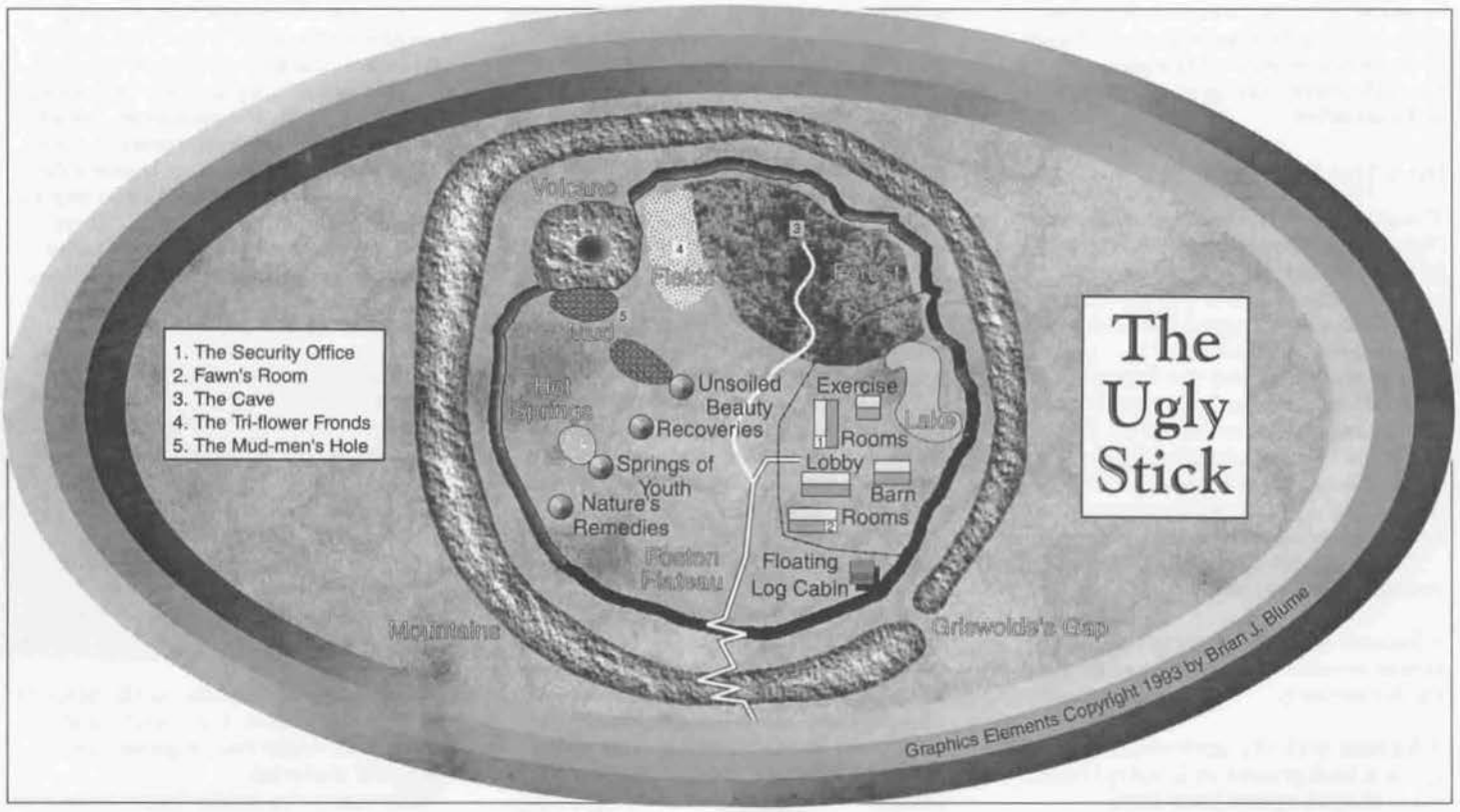
Into the Fields

As the party leaves the forest, one of the voices calls to them from the right.

As you walk through the forest, the air begins to smell much sweeter and the tree cover comes to an abrupt end. Ahead, you see a field of short grasses sprinkled liberally with flowers of all colors. In some patches the flowers grow higher than the grasses. The voice is calling to you from one of these areas—a patch of white and blue and violet flowers that range from two to eight feet tall.

The item, the velvet cushion, is buried several feet below the edge of a patch of tri-flower fronds.

Tri-flower frond: Int Non; AL N; AC 9; MV nil; HD 2+8; hp *; THAC0 16; #AT Varies; Dmg Special; SA see below; SD nil; SZ L; ML 14; XP 420.



* If the PCs' levels total less than 22, the plant has 18 hit points. If the PCs' levels total 23-25, the plant has 22 hit points. If the PCs' levels total 26+, the plant has 24 hit points.

Tri-flower fronds have dark green stalks topped by three flowers—blue, violet and white. The blue flower has eight pollen-covered tendrils which are three feet long. The plant attacks with these tendrils. On any successful hit by a tendril, the victim must save vs. poison or fall into a coma for 1d4 hours.

The plant's sensitive rootlets allow the plant to locate sleeping characters, and the violet flower squirts an enzyme on the victim. This enzyme inflicts 2d4 points of acid damage each round until it is washed off. Each pint of water reduces the damage by one point. Complete immersion removes the enzyme and stops the damage.

Once the enzymes start to work, the white blossom extends tendrils into the comatose character, draining bodily fluids for 1d6 damage per round until the plant or the victim is killed.

If more than three people are attacking the plant, a second, smaller blue flower can attack as well. This one has only three blue tendrils, and the party can simply back away from it to avoid additional attacks.

Once the plant is dead, the party can dig for the cushion. The field is filled with chunks of lava rock that make digging difficult.

The cushion is three feet down and is wrapped in a dark green cloth.

Into The Mud

Another voice, this one from the container's glass lid, comes from the far western side of the plateau, behind the shops and close to the volcano. The party must sneak around Unsoiled Beauty and past the mud holes to reach it.

> You slip past the mud holes at the back of the Unsoiled Beauty and approach the volcano. It is warm and humid here, and you are surprised to see tropical plants and even a few fruit trees with some small oranges and grapefruits. There is also a banana plant with nearly ripe bananas. There are many small springs all around, and one of them comes splashing down the volcano and into a puddle of mud that is almost 50 feet across. The voice is now quite loud, and is calling to you from below the waterfall.

Somebody has to go into the mud and retrieve the item. When the PCs disturb the mud, it begins to stir in a number of places, and mottled-brown heads rise up. Roundish bodies and pairs of arms quickly follow, and the creatures sling mud at the PCs.

The first time the PCs rouse the mudmen, the creatures ambush the PCs and get a free attack. If the PCs retreat, the mudmen sink back into the pool, but they return each time the PCs disturb the mud.

Mud-men (*): Int Non; AL N; AC 10; MV 3; HD 2; hp 12 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1 ; Dmg Special; SA Mud-throwing, suffocation; SD Special; SZ S; ML; XP 175 each.

*If the PCs' levels total less than 22, there are 8 mudmen. If the PCs' levels total 23-25, there are 9 mudmen. If the PCs levels total 26+, there are 11 mudmen.

Mud-men are unintelligent life forces that inhabit pools of mud. They attack any who enter their pool by hurling mud at them. Their attacks treat targets as AC 10, adjusting the AC only for Dexterity. The mud does no damage, but a successful hit lowers the target's movement rate by 1. While they attack,

the mudmen also move forward, throwing themselves at any target within 10 feet. A miss forces the mudman to spend one round reforming out of the mud, while a successful hit destroys the mudman but lowers the victim's movement rate by 4. Once an adventurer's movement reaches zero, he is covered with mud and starts to suffocate, suffering 1d8 points of damage per round until somebody else spends one round clearing out his nose and mouth. Once the melee ends, any lost movement rate is restored.

Mudmen are affected by all spells that cause damage to living creatures, but *dispel magic* and *dig* act as *fireballs.* They are immune to all poisons and are unaffected by spells that influence the mind.

Once the PCs dispose of the mudmen, the party can retrieve the glass lid.

If the PCs search through the mud further, they find several mud-soaked items: two pairs of boots, a hat, a cloth arm band, two suits of leather armor, and a backpack. A *detect magic* spell reveals that several of the items are magical. The loot includes *boots of varied tracks, boots of the north,* a *Heward's handy haversack,* and a *phylactery of long years.*

If the party examines the top of the waterfall, they find a small, battered brass shield blocking a tiny stream. This is a *shield +2.*

Into The Arms of the Law

The container's second fastener is calling from within the resort. It is not exactly guarded; it is in the bottom left-hand drawer of a desk in the security office. There is always at least one security guard on duty in this room, although a diversion might cause the guard to run off. Suitable diversions might include an illusory monster, a fake robbery, or anything else that impresses the DM™.

The security office is located on the first floor of the resort, just north of the bar and restaurant. To get there, the party must come through the front gates, go to the lobby, and register for a room (no unregistered visitors are permitted). The DM should make this as uncomfortable as possible, as snobs run the resort. If the party makes a particular nuisance of itself, be sure to have security keep a special eye on their activities.

Since the PCs don't have reservations (and probably don't look presentable), the staff puts them up in a "special" area. Normally the resort charges 100 gp a week per person; however, they have a special room that they are willing to make available to the party for 5 gp a night per person. After the gold has changed hands, the resort staff directs the PCs to one of the stalls in the horse barn. Of course, fresh hay will be supplied. Food is extra, supplies are extra, drinks are extra, use of the facilities is extra—everything is extra! All prices in the resort area are about three times normal; the employees insist that the extra costs are due to the difficulty of bringing supplies up to the plateau.

If the PCs start a fight here, a security force quickly arrives. A hotel staff member asks the PCs to quiet down or the guards will attack. Captured PCs are thrown in the resort's two holding cells (see the Dealing with Dan section for details). The special force consists of two marids and several humans.

Marids (2): Int High; AL CG; AC 0; MV 9, Fl 15; HD 13; hp 65 each; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 8-32 (8d4); SA Special; SD Special; SZ H; ML 16; XP 16,000 each.

Marids can use the following powers, twice each per day, at 26th level: *detect evil/good, detect invisibility, detect magic, invisibility,* assume liquid form, *polymorph self,* and *purify water.* Marids can perform any of the following up to seven times per day: *assume gaseous form, lower water, part water, wall of fog,* and bestow *water breathing* upon others for up to one full day. Once per year a marid can use *wish.*

Marids are not harmed by water-based spells. Cold-based spells grant them a +2 bonus to saving throws and a −2 to each die of damage. Fire inflicts +1 per die of damage, with saving throws at −1.

Head of Security, Dan: Int Average; AL CG; AC 2; MV 12; HD F5; hp 42; THAC0 12; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 or pummel, wrestle; SZ M; ML 18; XP 420.

Magic items: *Bracers of defense AC 2, dagger +3*

Guards (12): Int Very; AL CG; AC 4; MV 9; HD F3; hp 22 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA pummel, wrestle; SZ M; ML 18; XP 175 each.

Equipment: Chain mail, dagger

These security guards arrive in groups of 12. There are 72 guards at the resort, and a prolonged fight eventually will attract every one of them. All the security forces prefer non-lethal combat. Dan and the guards have the punching and wrestling specializations from the *Complete Fighter's Handbook;* if your campaign does not use the handbook, Dan and the guards get three attacks every two rounds and gain a +1 "to hit" and a +2 damage bonus when punching or wrestling.

If the PCs decide to cooperate and make reservations, continue with the adventure. Once they pay their money, the resort staff makes them feel reasonably welcome.

Fawn is one of the people the PCs meet. She is clothed in a green dress and a gray cloak that hides her stunning figure. Make sure she introduces herself by name so that the party recognizes her later. Fawn can fill many posts at the resort: door person, registrar, hostess, or anything else the DM finds convenient.

When the party goes after the second fastener, they can follow the voice to an unmarked door near the bar. If they watch the door, they see a number of people coming and going from this room. If the party has had any dealings with security, they recognize the people. If the haven't tangled with security, perhaps they notice that the only people they have seen with weapons are those going in and out of this door.

The Security Office

There are always 1d3 guards in the office, and Dan spends about half his time in here. If the PCs watch the door carefully, they can get in while Dan is away and only a single guard is inside.

If the party just barges in, they have an all-out fight on their hands. Use statistics from the previous encounter.

Getting inside is a simple matter, all the PCs have to do is knock politely on the door. The guards are accustomed to handling special requests and questions from guests, so the PCs can enter the office on the flimsiest pretence. Once inside, the party will have to come up with a plan either to trick the guards out of the room or to find some trick or spell that temporarily puts them out of commission. If a fight breaks out, it is likely that the PCs will be either captured or removed from the premises.

Inside the room the PCs find three chairs facing a large wooden desk. Behind the desk is a comfortable-looking leather chair. At the back of the office are two small open cells, each of which contains several jars and bowls and a

single cot. A map of the resort covers one wall. The other wall has lists of guests by room, lists of employees, etc. In the bottom left-hand desk drawer, under a stack of blank paper, is the other fastener.

If the party has the time and inclination to search, they can discover other things. The middle right-hand desk drawer has a box with five master keys. Four of them can be used to open any room in the resort. The fifth key opens the holding cell.

Dealing With Dan

If the PCs were thrown into the security cells, Dan questions them. He wants to know why the PCs have come to the resort. He also wants to know where they are from and what they are after. If the PCs are anything but contrite and deferential, Dan asks whether they would rather be tossed down the side of the mountain or walk peacefully away after paying a 200 gp fine.

If the PCs mention the *wand of ugliness*, Dan becomes friendly. He knows something has been making guests uglier, and he has been trying to get to the bottom of it. If the PCs explain about the tablet and their efforts to put the box together, Dan agrees to release them and let them pursue their quest—after dark.

He doesn't want the resort owners to know he is letting prisoners escape. Further, he doesn't want the PCs mentioning the wands to the guests. He warns the PCs that doing so would certainly make him inclined to throw them down mountain.

If the PCs do not reveal their mission to Dan, they'll either have to break out of the cells, pay their fine and leave, or be thrown down the mountain (3d6 points of damage and all equipment makes two saving throws vs. crushing blow).

If the PCs subsequently get into trouble inside the resort or start to blabber about the *wand of ugliness*, a squad of guards appears and escorts them to the holding cells.

Once the PCs are locked up again, Dan talks to them privately. He'll release them as long as they promise to keep him posted on their progress in finding and neutralizing the wands. He warns them not to tell the guests about the wands. It would be bad for business if word leaked out that ugliness was stalking the plateau. The PCs won't receive a third warning about keeping the wands a secret. If they talk about them again, they are summarily removed from the plateau.

Up Into the Air

The gap in the mountains southeast of the plateau affords a beautiful view of the land below. The view from the log cabin that floats 20 feet in the air here is even more spectacular. Esmerelda, a retired adventurer in her 50s, lives here with Esther, her chimpanzee familiar.

Fawn hid one piece of the container in the cabin. When the locals threw a party for Esmeralda's birthday, Fawn filled the box with dirt and planted some flowers in it. The box now rests in one of the cabin's windows.

The party hears the box calling from the cabin, but they cannot tell exactly where it is until they enter the cabin. If the PCs can't fly or levitate, the only way they can get in is to get Esther's attention.

If the PCs stand beneath the cabin and call out, Esther pokes her head out a window and screams at them. If the party keeps calling, Esther hops around, screeching and taunting the PCs.

Esther is feeling a little hungry, and she wants the PCs to give her food (in particular, one of the bananas from the muddy area). If the party doesn't think of this, Esther leans over the rail holding a piece of bread, takes a bite, then rubs her stomach and screams.

If the party offers a banana, Esther lowers a rope ladder and scampers down to get the fruit.

The ladder leads to the front porch, which holds several plants and a large rocking chair. If the PCs knock on the door, Esmerelda answers. She is very pleased to have company, but tends to be condescending toward "poor, sad, plain-looking folks" because she is sure that they won't find many friends on the plateau.

If the party explains their problem, Esmerelda is more than happy to help—she gets the planter out of the window and presents it to the PCs, but only after she transplants the flowers to a small flower pot. She does not remember who gave her the box, "There were just so many nice people giving me presents that day!" She urges the party to be careful, as she suspects that anybody using the wands must be evil because the wands must use a specialized form of *vampiric touch* to produce their effects.

Into The Arms of Real Trouble

Once the party acquires all the parts of the container and assembles them, they can find the wands—the container will lead the PCs to them. The person holding the container hears two voices saying, "Go away box, leave me alone."

The party can follow the voices to Fawn's room in the resort. The door is locked, and unless the PCs have the master keys from the security office they'll have to pick the lock, use a *knock* spell, or batter down the door.

> You open the door to a small room. There is a bed with a green lace bedspread, a little pine dresser, and a wooden table and chair which have been stained green. The table holds a fine mirror and countless brushes, combs, and small bottles. The scent of floral perfume pervades the room.

The bottles contain the makeup Fawn uses to disguise her looks.

The party can hear the wands' voices coming from under the floor in one of the corners. A cursory investigation reveals a loose floorboard; underneath, there is a small metal box and a rolled-up towel.

As PCs begin examining the box and the towel, the door opens behind them.

> A woman dressed in a gray cloak and hood and a green dress opens the door and gasps in surprise. "What are all you people doing in my . . . Oh, it's you people again. I'm Fawn. Remember, we met when you were checking in. Are you here to get Robin's sticks? He said somebody would come for them." She looks both ways down the hall and comes into the room. Three muscular gentlemen follow her.

Fawn is playing for time. She heard the party in her room, cast a *protection from good* spell, and removed her makeup. Once inside the room, she reveals herself in all her artificial glory.

> The woman pulls back her hood and throws off her cloak, and you find yourselves viewing the most beautiful creature you have ever seen.

Fawn explains that Robin is her boyfriend, he gave her the "sticks" for safekeeping. While talking, she uses the *charm* power from her *ring of human influence* on as many male PCs as she

can affect (maximum 21 levels worth). Each target can save vs. spells to avoid the *charm*. Unless the PCs are wary of a trick, Fawn gets a free round to use the *ring*.

The fighters are *charmed* resort guards, and use non-lethal combat. Once the PCs begin resisting, Fawn takes the following actions for the first three or four rounds while her fighters press the attack:

1. Casts *charm person or mammal* on a PC to keep him or her friendly.
2. Casts *hold person* on one PC.
3. Casts *heat metal* on an armored PC or uses the *suggestion* power from her *ring of human influence*.

When the non-lethal spells are gone, Fawn goes for the kill, using her *cause light wounds* on PCs, then attacking with her *staff*.

If the battle goes against her, Fawn casts *feign death*, hoping to get a chance to slip away.

If Fawn wins the battle, she ties up all the PCs. If any have been reduced to fewer than zero hit points, she tries to cure them. Once she has her prisoners secure, she begins bopping them with the *wand of ugliness*. Each PC gets hit once, decreasing his or her Comeliness by 1d6. Eventually the PCs will wake up in their home city, uglier, but otherwise none the worse for wear. Fawn, of course, is long gone; she leaves the plateau and goes looking for other victims to plunder in the pursuit of beauty.

Fawn: Int Exceptional; AL CE; AC 2; MV 12; HD P5; hp 30; THAC0 18; #AT 1 or spell; Dmg 1-6+2 or by spell; SZ M; ML 18; XP 650.

Magic items: *Bracers of defense AC 6, staff +2, ring of human influence,* three *potions of extra healing.*

Spells: *Cause light wounds* (×2), *protection from good* (already cast and running at the beginning of the encounter), *cure light wounds, charm person or mammal, hold person, aid, heat metal, feign death*

Fighters (*): Int Average; AL CG; AC 4; MV 9; HD F3; hp 22 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA pummel, wrestle; SZ M; ML 18; XP 175 each.

Equipment: Chain mail, dagger

If the PCs' total levels are less than 22, Fawn has three charmed fighters at her beck and call. If their levels total 23-29 she has four fighters; at 30-35 she has five fighters; and at 36+ she has six fighters.

The Aftermath

If the PCs are victorious, the non-charmed security guards quickly arrive on the scene, lead by Dan. The PCs are declared heroes.

The metal box in Fawn's room contains a few gems, the proceeds from a few secret "ugliness cures" Fawn sold to resort guests on the side. The DM™ is free to give them a value appropriate for the campaign; 3,000-18,000 gp is the suggested range.

Once the PCs put the box together, they can use it to neutralize the wands. When that happens, Fawn loses her stolen beauty (with a shriek of pain), and her victims regain the beauty they lost. Dan gives the PCs Fawn's treasure as a thank you.

Further, the resort staff extends their thanks by allowing the PCs to use the resort's facilities, gratis. Each morning, a cosmetologist comes to the PCs' rooms and helps make them more presentable. Finally, each of PC is given a chance to select *one* additional reward:

- A PC who has an available non-weapon proficiency slot can learn the disguise, land-based riding (horse), spellcraft, swimming, or wrestling proficiencies from the resort staff at no charge.

- A PC can receive treatments that will raise the character's Comeliness score one point.

- A PC can choose one item from the following list: *powder of coagulation* (character gets four tubes), *powder of the hero's heart* (four packets), *powder of magic detection* (packet of a dozen pinches). These items are described in the *Tome of Magic*.

In addition to experience from defeating foes, the party receives an additional 5,000 xp for neutralizing the wands, 3,000 xp for putting a stop to Fawn's shenanigans at the resort, and 2,000 xp for capturing Fawn alive.

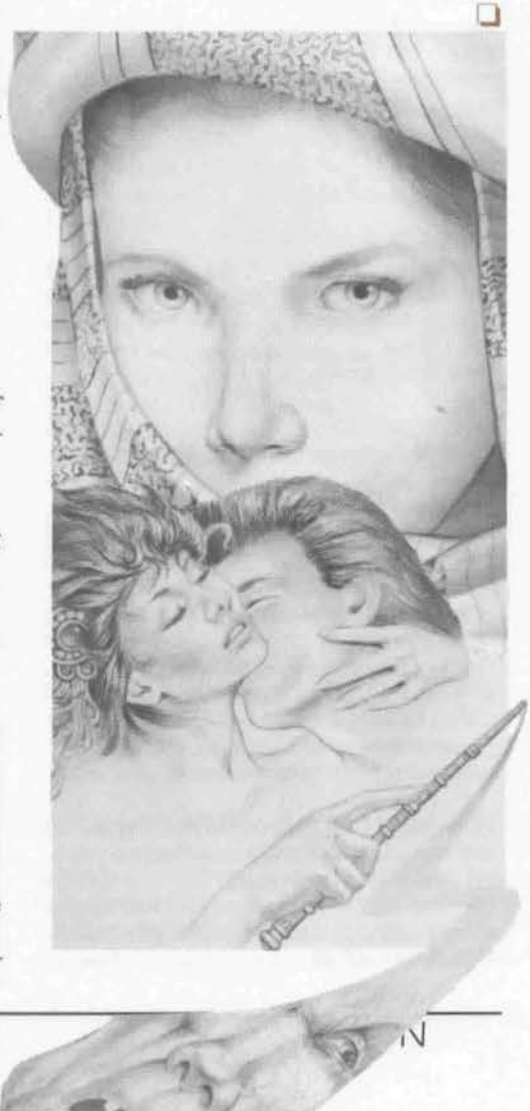
Comeliness

Much of this scenario relies on the Comeliness rules from the Network's Living City tournaments. The DM™ can institute this rule, or the DM can simply substitute Charisma whenever the scenario mentions Comeliness. Here are the Comeliness rules:

Comeliness reflects a character's physical attractiveness. It can influence the initial reactions NPCs have to a character. Comeliness is not Charisma. The latter score represents a character's force of personality.

Unlike in the original edition of the AD&D® game, a character's Comeliness score is not adjusted based on Charisma, nor can characters with high Comeliness scores "fascinate" others. Comeliness in Living City play affects reaction bonuses that are tied to Charisma. Therefore, a character with a high Charisma and a high Comeliness has a significant reaction bonus.

Comeliness	Reaction Adjustment
6	−2
7	−1
8-12	0
13	+1
14	+2
15	+3
16	+5
17	+6
18	+7



The Enigma Revealed

Winning Contest Entries

Our *Enigma* contest in issue #77 challenged readers to identify a mysterious woman bedecked with unusual jewelry and an even more unusual face. Readers suggested a whole range of histories and personalities, from hapless adventurers to vengeful deities. Most characters had tragic pasts—vials of acid were a popular plot device.

The jury presents its two favorite here:

1st Place

An Honorable Tradition,
by David Yarrow, Milton, Queensland, Australia
GAMMA WORLD® 4th edition game

Pescumel
6th Level Female Altered Human Esper

PS: 8
DX: 9
CN: 14
MS: 17
IN: 16
CH: 13
SN: 11

THAC Melee: 0
Damage Bonus: 0
Max Lift: 80 kg.
THAC Ranged: 2
Stealth: 0
Remain Unseen: 1
Health: 11
Hit Points: 71
Mental Defense: 19 (22 with headdress)
Use Artifacts: 3
Robot Recognition: 16
Perception: 12
Armor Class: 13
Speed (walk/swim): 12/3

General Skills: Read/write 60%, swim 25%, ride 30%
Class Skills: Hypnosis (10), photographic memory (9), identify mental power (9), sense mental power (8)

Physical Mutations: Body change—scales on left side of face, left eye altered, vocal imitation
Mental Mutations: Density control, others (MP 19), empathy (MP 14), repulsion field (MP 21)

Equipment: Bolt-action rifle, 15 rounds of ammunition, duralloy shield, headdress (+3 MD), ear chain

Pescumel is a handsome woman with no visible mutations other than her albino left eye and the scales on the left half of her face. A small vine shrouds the scaly half of her face. This vine is Seadry, a sentient, symbiotic plant.

Pescumel doesn't wear armor, but she does wear a headdress that improves her mental defense. One of Pescumel's distant ancestors, who had great knowledge of mental powers, crafted it and handed it down to the succeeding generations. Pescumel also wears a chain strung from ear to ear, identifying her as a member of the group known as The Free Ones.

Pescumel is a native of Ryzeen, a township within the borders of Miacholin ruled by the carrin (dark emperors) with their usual tact and wisdom—that is to say, with an iron fist. (See page 178 of the 4th edition GAMMA WORLD® game rule book for details on Miacholin.)

Miacholin absorbed Ryzeen about 60 years ago. Ryzeen was, and still remains, a fairly peaceful place. The only use for weapons in the town is to defend the citizens against the freakish (even for Gamma Terra) creatures which emerge from the thistle forest north of town almost daily. When Miacholin annexed Ryzeen, there were no great objections. However, the townsfolk soon found that they were expected to give up many of their ancient traditions—holidays, amusements, and the like. The most important of the banned traditions was a ritual that allowed the citizens to form a group mind. At the time, the Ryzeenians had a unique understanding of mental powers.

Today, almost all of the early rituals have been forgotten, except by a very few. The Free Ones are dedicated to preserving the town's ancient knowledge, and Pescumel is their current leader. Unfortunately, the Free Ones' membership has been shrinking ever since it was formed 60 years ago. At one stage, it could have been considered a major cryptic alliance, with almost every citizen of Ryzeen a member. Today, there are fewer than 20 members. The history of The Free Ones is not a happy tale. From the beginning, the carrin have seen them as a threat and have pursued them almost to extinction.

For the past 10 years, the group has not been safe even in Ryzeen. The townsfolk are well enough satisfied with life under the dark emperors, so few wish to risk trouble for the group's sake. Consequently, The Free Ones get virtually no support in their home city.

The Free Ones spend most of their time battling or evading the troops of Miacholin. Every moment of safety is given over to learning and sharing the knowledge the group seeks to preserve. It is becoming harder for the group to get equipment—they generally have access only to level II technology and whatever they can scavenge from fallen Miacholin troops. It won't be long before they can no longer repair what level II equipment they have. The situation is becoming so bad that Pescumel is considering taking them north into the thistle forest. Pescumel is willing to risk exposing the group to the dangerous beasts that dwell there, since remaining within Miacholin and Ryzeen will inevitably spell disaster.

Pescumel became leader of The Free Ones a year ago when the previous leader was killed in Ryzeen by Miacholin troops. In many ways, Pescumel believes she was not ready for the position and that circumstances forced it upon her. Most of Pescumel's associates have noticed that she has become more and more distant and preoccupied since she became leader.

Pescumel can be a very bitter woman. This is understandable considering that for most of her 32 years she has seen her friends hunted and killed by the carrin and their servants. She still cares very much for her friends, but now her responsibilities have forced her to take risks with their lives, and this weighs heavily on her conscience. Despite all of this, there still are moments when her good nature shines through. However, these occasions are becoming less frequent.

Pescumel's empathy mutation makes her a natural leader, and all of The Free Ones are fanatically loyal to her. Further, Pescumel recently has found an unusual ally in Seadry, the sentient plant that is symbiotically attached to her. Pescumel detected Seadry's intelligence with the empathy mutation. For reasons known only to itself, Seadry adopted Pescumel. It uses its mutations to heal her and to attack Pescumel's foes in mental combat, but it has not chosen to control her. Perhaps it realizes that The Free Ones will remove it if Pescumel began acting differently, or perhaps Seadry is genuinely fond of Pescumel.

Seadry

SP; NCC; AC 9 (can be hit only by a called shot when it is draped over Pescumel); MD 11; HP 40; THAC −2 (−1); Dmg as mental mutation; Hth 10; Spd 4/2/2; Per 18; St −1; RU 6; UA 4, RR 0

PS 5; DX 7; CN 10; MS 13; IN 20; CH 9; SN 14

Mutations: Transfusion (special) (17), photogeneration (13), confusion (19), heightened intelligence, telekinetic flight (13); symbiotic attachment (15)

Seadry is a simple vine. It has no means of communicating except via its symbiotic attachment mutation and Pescumel's empathy mutation. Seadry knows all of Pescumel's thoughts and feelings. Similarly, Pescumel understands Seadry's emotions.

Seadry's transfusion mutation is a special version that works on any sentient creature, not just on other plants. So far, seadry has used this power only on Pescumel, who is not aware that the vine can help others besides herself.

2nd Place

Renate,
by Jeff Williamson, Evanston, IL
Vampire: The Masquerade

Renate

9th Generation Female Malkavian Caregiver

Concept: Singer
Demeanor: Loner
Attributes: *Physical:* Strength •, Dexterity ••• (graceful), Stamina ••; *Social:* Charisma •••• (captivating), Manipulation ••, Appearance •/•••• if left side of face is covered (alluring); *Mental:* Perception: ••, Intelligence: •••, Wits •••
Abilities: *Talents:* Singing ••••• (opera), Acting •••, Empathy •••, Seduction •••; *Skills:* Etiquette ••••, Stealth •, Disguise ••, Style •••, Dance •••; *Knowledge:* Literature •, Linguistics ••, History ••
Advantages: *Disciplines:* Auspex ••, Obfuscate •; *Backgrounds:* Generation ••••, Resources •••, Contacts ••; *Virtues:* Conscience ••••, Self-Control ••, Humanity •••••••••, Willpower •••••

Renate van Nuys graced the stages of opera houses throughout Germany during the late 1920s. This was the height of German pre-war cultural awareness, and van Nuys was immensely popular. One critic in Bonn

hailed her singing as "rhapsodic, as if one were listening to the earthly incarnation of a chorus of angels." Accolades followed her after every performance, as did a wide range of suitors. Although her demeanor was mild and unassuming, her appearance and talent made her a national icon, worshipped and adored by the masses.

In 1927, Renate embarked on an American concert tour. A composer from Manhattan had seen her on stage in Berlin and offered to give her the starring role in his latest opera, which was based on the life of Cleopatra. This role might have won her international fame, but fate soon would deal her a serious reverse.

Unknown to Renate, one of her most dedicated followers was a woman named Stephanie Holt, who had been Germany's celebrated diva during the 1880s. By the early 1900s, Stephanie was more than 40 years old and had watched her own beauty fade away slowly, like the last rays of light during sunset. One day, Stephanie met a manic, youthful-looking man who claimed to be a fan from years ago. This man, who was a vampire, embraced Stephanie and transformed her into a vampire, too.

By the time Renate's star rose, Stephanie had been entrapped in an aged vampiric body for more than 20 years. Renate became an object not of Stephanie's adoration, but of her venom.

Stephanie attended Renate's final performance in Frankfurt, before her American tour. Stephanie had become insanely jealous of Renate's beauty, and her hatred boiled over as she entered Renate's dressing room after the show. Once inside, Stephanie hurled a vial of sulfuric acid, which splattered over the left side of Renate's head, neck, and shoulder.

The acid burns and shock alone might have killed Renate, but Stephanie was moved to perform an act of compassion and spite. Stephanie embraced her victim. The vampiric blood soothed Renate's physical agony, but did not heal her scars. Stephanie had erased Renate's pain, but also had doomed her to the same immortal torment she was suffering herself. After calming the sobbing girl, Stephanie took leave of her forever.

Renate was dazed and confused; when she finally came to realize what had happened to her, she smashed he dressing room mirror with her valise and fled screaming into the Frankfort night. Her early months as a vampire were a drama of tribulations.

Finally, a Malkavian named August took her under his wing. As it happened, August was the vampire who had embraced Stephanie. August felt a sense of responsibility and warmth toward Renate, and made it his business to teach her about vampiric powers and the machinations of vampire society. Eventually, Renate took leave of her mentor and set off on her own.

Renate traveled by rail to Spain, and then on to the United Sates by ocean liner. She immediately set out exploring the country and seeking others of her kind. She spent much of her time in New York City, haunting the theater where she would have made her American debut. She also secretly attended several performances of the opera in which she would have starred.

Today, Renate is a tragic figure. The hardships she has endured over the years have gradually fractured her sanity. She still believes she is the beloved opera singer of so many years ago and often experiences the delusion that those around her are her fans and suitors. She still wanders the darkened corridors of the old theater, and she occasionally sings her arias to an audience of none.

Renate is no fool, however. Once she became accustomed to her vampire status, she took some good advice and invested her savings (which were not trivial) in the post-World-War-II American stock market. She maintains a mortal contact who handles her assets and withdraws money for her when necessary.

Some of her money goes to preserve the opera house where she resides; the building would have been demolished years ago without her anonymous patronage. Renate also has spent a great deal of money on two pieces of jewelry: a headdress and an earring pendant. These baubles are her one affectation. They are replicas of what she would have worn in the operatic role of Cleopatra. They have no special properties, but are made of gold set with opals and emeralds. The set has been appraised at more than $500,000 and Renate is extremely possessive of them.

In her early years as a vampire, Renate dabbled briefly in vampire society, but quickly decided that vampire politics are too complex for her taste. She prefers her solitude, but she tolerates the occasional visitor. She has developed a motherly attitude toward young kindred (newly made vampires). Perhaps she remembers the kindness August showed her. In mortal society, she is known as the ghost of the theater, an urban legend with some measure of truth.

Singing remains Renate's greatest love. Here voice still is extraordinary, and the mortal or kindred who gets a chance to hear her sing is fortunate indeed. She still occasionally braves the outside world to attend an opera or stage musical, using her talents to disguise herself. Any kindred who can demonstrate an appreciation of the arts will win her favor.

Judges' Choice

The judges congratulate the following members for their entries: Joanne M. Reinbold, Wilmington, DE; David Ward, Rumati South, New Zealand; Kevin Mooneyham, Eugene, OR; Jeremy Stanilious, Wharton, NJ; Edward C. Richardson, Battle Creek, MI; Tom Allen, Fort Worth, TX; Paul Reigel, Amelia, OH; Thuong Pham, Los Angeles, CA; Justin D. Somma, Brooklyn, NY; Roy A. Pinson III, Valrico, FL; Alex S. Foley, Pittsburgh, PA; Scott Shepard, Cohoes, NY.

The Living Galaxy

To The Ends Of The Galaxy: Epic Campaigns, Part 1

by Roger E. Moore

One of the great movie-moments in my life came with the opening scenes of the first *Star Wars* film. To this day, I still remember the electric thrill that passed through me as I looked down on a completely realistic alien world and watched starships battle to the death. I witnessed a great event as it happened, the unfolding of a tremendous story. I was swept up and swept away.

Many science fiction role playing adventures are a series of short quests linked only by the presence of the same adventuring party. Duplicating that swept-away feeling of *Star Wars*, the sense that the player characters are a part of a tremendous story rather than a grubby sequence of high-profit missions designed to pay off a loan to buy a starship, is difficult at best because of the careful plotting required of the game master. It can be practically impossible if the group doesn't have the time or interest to try it.

If you are a GM gifted with a stable bunch of long-duration gamers, however, you can't do better than to create a central theme to unify their separate adventures. Anyone who understands the satisfying emotional and intellectual pull of fantasy epics like that of Tolkien's Middle-earth will approve of starting an epic adventure.

As noted, epic campaigns have a major drawback: They take a long time to complete. Players may come and go, interest may rise and fall, and the GM might even have to stop gaming for some reason. Still, if the gamers can meet at least weekly, if a core group of interested gamers will remain throughout the campaign, and if a new GM can be found to take over the campaign in the event the first GM leaves, the campaign can be carried on for many months or even years. I've seen AD&D® campaigns that have lasted more than a decade; science fiction games can do just as well.

A second drawback is that the GM must choose the theme for the adventure series very carefully. Players don't like to be led by the nose. Forcing them into a campaign in which, for instance, they must fight a nearly hopeless space war against grotesque aliens might cause them to abandon the campaign completely for one with more personal freedom and more hope of accomplishing their goals.

Tempting players into a campaign, instead of herding them into it, is an art that the GM should cultivate. It might pay to discuss a long-term campaign with the players, though not in great detail to preserve surprises.

In creating an epic campaign, the GM must first work out the themes that will dominate the long-playing struggle. Against a galactic background, a single battle is a little thing. The theme should reflect a conflict that is greater than any mere person; philosophies and ideals are often at war, and the fate of billions may hang in the balance. Indeed, an epic campaign may have more than one theme, though one should be dominant.

Examples of grand themes follow in this and the next two issues. Some were drawn from the "one-world campaigns" described in POLYHEDRON® Newszine issues #71-73 (look these issues up for more information).

Of these themes, it is worth noting that the MacGuffin adventures are likely to turn into campaigns of entirely different sorts; a searched-for object or being is often the lightning rod for a deeper conflict between two opposing forces, usually those of freedom/life and slavery/destruction. The recovery or disposal of the MacGuffin then becomes only a part of the bigger picture. After all, Indiana Jones did not prevent World War II, even if his adventures *were* successful.

Slavery Or Freedom

Fantasy, science fiction, horror, and real history can provide examples of grand themes for your campaigns. In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo's mission to drop the One Ring into the lava of Mount Doom is merely the finish of a much greater struggle between the evil Sauron and the forces of the Maiar, played out with the peoples of Middle-earth as the pawns.

Luke Skywalker's battles against Darth Vader are the core (but still only a part) of the cosmic war between the tyrannical Empire and the Rebel forces.

Nearly all of Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* adventures revolve around the eventual return to power of the Old Ones, the mad gods from outer space who wish to destroy all humanity, though individual humans resist.

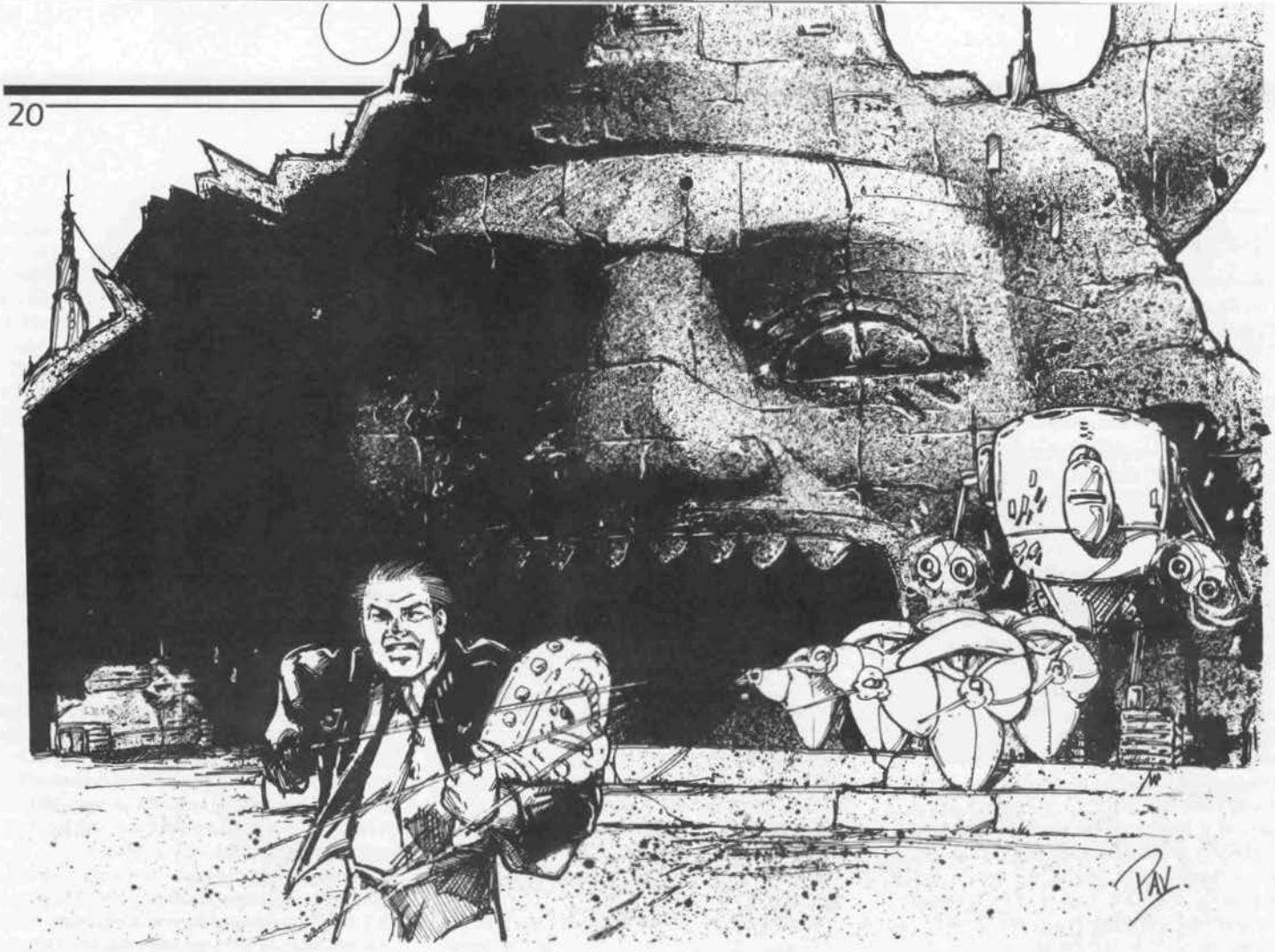
World War II was by far the most destructive war known, a conflict in which almost every nation was involved in the fight between the Axis powers and the Allies.

In the above four examples, the fate of the world or even the universe is at stake, and the conflict is essentially one of life and free will vs. slavery and destruction. You can imagine numerous possible variations on this idea, not all of which need to be battles to save the galaxy (one world, as pointed out here many times before, will do fine).

You could have a planet conquered by a powerful outside military force that virtually enslaves the populace; the PCs join resistance groups seeking to overthrow the conquerors, who might be human, alien, or robotic. This idea would work for the *MegaTraveller, Star Wars: The RPG, Mekton II, GURPS Space, Space Opera, Justifiers, BattleTech, Warhammer 40,000, Renegade Legion, Aftermath, Aliens, 2300 AD,* AD&D SPELLJAMMER®, GAMMA WORLD®, and STAR FRONTIERS® games. Several of these games have adventures with this very pattern. (Indeed, the idea is integral to the *Rifts, Rifts: The Mechanoids, Price of Freedom, Robotech, Torg, Day of the Phoenix,* and *Living Steel* games.)

Variations on the freedom vs. slavery/extinction theme could be developed from many science fiction sources. Fred Saberhagen's Berserker series and Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*, for instance, are grand in concept but also usable in gaming; all you need to do is to fill the universe with murderous, mile-long robot starships in the former or hostile, spiderlike, collectivist aliens in the latter.

TSR's BUGHUNTERS™ game, using an interesting twist to unify its many sources, envisions a galactic struggle in which humanity is an innocent bystander and must fight merely to stay in existence. Because of the game's newness, I won't reveal the grand cam-



paign's secrets here. However, the concept of xenophobia, the fear of those who are not like you, is central to both the grand campaign and its component adventures.

Wars for life and freedom are possible on planetary surfaces, too. Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*, for instance, details a particularly horrific invasion of parasitic aliens that control living beings by touch. Other aliens-invading-Earth novels include Keith Roberts *The Furies*, John Wyndham's *Out of the Deeps*, and *Footfall*, by Jerry Pournelle and Larry Niven. The movies *Them!, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Terminator II: Judgment Day, Day of the Triffids, The Thing, The War of the Worlds,* and *Dawn of the Dead* cover similar variations on this war-against-awful-monsters theme. Look up Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, too.

The *Traveller* double adventure *Chamax Plague/Horde* is a straightforward battle against unintelligent but ravenous invaders, and several types of invaders are covered in the book *Twilight Nightmares*, for the *Twilight: 2000* game. However, fighting an intelligent foe is always more interesting than fighting a dumb one, so giant ants, triffids, and zombies aren't as durable in the long run as Terminators, Puppet Masters, and bug-eyed monsters with ray guns, flying saucers, and strategic plans. I'd keep wars against dumb opponents shorter than those against smart ones, though the former can be fun to play out ("Fritz! There's another giant ant!").

Many science fiction role playing games come with their own "evil other," an appropriately hostile alien race that menaces humankind across many worlds (e.g., Orks, Klingons, Mellor, Kzinti, Daleks, Mechanoids, Sathar, and the ever-popular Aliens who trouble Officer Ripley at every turn).

The Kafer War in GDW's *2300 AD* game seems particularly well thought out as a broad alien-invasion campaign in which scores of adventures, great and small, could be placed. GMs for other science fiction games are encouraged to look through copies of GDW's *Mission Arcturus, Invasion, Kafer Dawn, Kafer Sourcebook*, and *Aurore Sourcebook* for the ways in which the Kafer invasion provides action aplenty for spacefaring heroes. The defense and reconquest of the world of Aurore is effectively a campaign in itself.

In my opinion, however, humans make the best and most believable villains of all—just ask Darth Vader. A campaign in which human and alien PCs must ally to stop a human threat would be entertaining for almost any game; the *Star Wars* and *MegaTraveller* games, in fact, do just that.

Plot support for the "evil human empire" campaign can be found outside the science fiction genre with ease. The movie *Red Dawn* (often mentioned in this column) used human adversaries: the Soviets and their Communist allies, who also appear in Oliver Lange's novel, *Vandenberg*, and a host of other films, books, and TV shows (e.g., "Amerika"). Human foes have motives we can understand, even if we don't agree with them; insane or stupid foes can't hold a candle to one who has strengths, weaknesses, and dreams that we recognize and perhaps even share. A foe should not be a caricature, like the crazy evil wizard one always finds in fantasy games. Even Attila the Hun and Josef Stalin had human sides, and the GM should develop that to make the campaign even stronger.

Still borrowing from real history, a Nazi-like state could attack the PCs' home nation, with background and adventure elements drawn from volumes on World War II. A good example

would be Eugen Kogon's *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, which gives graphic details on how Nazi concentration camps and secret police operated, as well as on the Nazis' ultimate goals.

Also look at other books discussing the French Resistance, the Pacific carrier wars, Marine assaults on island citadels like Guadalcanal, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the evacuation at Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the raid against the docks at St. Nazaire, the race to build the atomic bomb, Nazi secret weapons, and spy operations.

Historical movies such as the award-winning *Victory at Sea* series would be invaluable resource material. Action/adventure movies such as *The Dirty Dozen, The Guns of Navarone, Force Ten From Navarone, Casablanca, Midway, The Longest Day, Shining Through, A Bridge Too Far, Kelly's Heroes, Von Ryan's Express, Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo, The Bridge at Remagden, Memphis Belle, Desperate Journey, The Sands of Iwo Jima, Tora! Tora! Tora!,* and *The Great Escape* could easily be brought into science fiction settings as separate elements of a grand world-war campaign, with the proper conversions.

The tales of the Illuminati and other paranoid-conspiracy theories about hidden societies that manipulate world history might find their way into an epic freedom-vs.-slavery campaign. I think of the battles against the group called The Nine in Philip José Farmer's Lord Grandrith/Doc Caliban trilogy (*A Feast Unknown, Lord of the Trees,* and *The Mad Goblin*) as an excellent example of this sort of conflict. You could (and probably should) borrow loads of ideas from the *GURPS Illuminati* book.

Carrying the "dreadful alien" paranoia a bit further and making the control more obvious, what about a godlike alien intelligence on the order of Sauron that wished to enslave all other races of a given world? (Perhaps the "alien" is actually an enhanced or psionic human.)

What if a rogue computer like D. F. Jones's Colossus decided to forcibly govern humanity according to its own game plan? There are always races like the Thrint slavers of Larry Niven's Known Space novels (particularly *World of Ptavvs*) or the horrifying alien of John Brunner's *The Atlantic Abomination* available to conquer a world by mental domination. Perhaps they keep themselves hidden from the populace if they don't wish to be worshiped by their underlings or preside openly over them as slave lords (and thus attract outside attention). For example, Fred Saberhagen's *Berserker's Planet* describes a barbaric world secretly dominated by a Berserker attempting to kill off the best representatives of the human species.

Campaign twists serve well to keep game-play revitalized and fresh. For a literary example, D. F. Jones's Colossus trilogy describes a future history in which our world's governments are taken over by a dictatorial computer system. In the second book, the computer Colossus is overthrown by scientists with the help of godlike Martians—but the price the Martians exact for their help causes the humans to restart Colossus in the third book. The once-feared tyrant has become a savior!

One particular problem with a campaign based on warfare is that frequent battles could result in high character turnover, depending on the lethality of the game mechanics. One solution is for everyone to have more than one character in the campaign, but to play only one at a time. Careful planning on the players' part will also prolong their PCs' lives, but war, as they say, is hell, and nothing is sure.

Some of the sting could be taken out by having players role play members of a single commando team, spy cell, family, or resistance unit, with the unit living on while its members do not. In Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* game, few Investigators live more than a half-dozen adventures, but the fight against the Old Ones is carried on nonetheless. The thrill is in the playing.

MacGuffin Hunt: The Relic

Indiana Jones-style exploration epics, in which treasure hunters search for valuable (and usually extremely dangerous) relics, can also turn into long-playing campaigns. These are often referred to as "MacGuffin Hunts," which were first described in this column in issue #71.

For our purposes, a MacGuffin is a much-wanted being or thing that is sought by the adventurers and possibly other groups. The MacGuffin is usually dangerous for one or two reasons: 1) It has great power in and of itself, sort of like the Ark of the Covenant and Holy Grail of the first and third Indiana Jones movies; or 2) Everyone else wants it badly enough to kill for it (again, like the Grail and the Ark). In this section, we'll consider MacGuffins that are devices.

Larry Niven's short story, "The Soft Weapon," describes a perfect example of such a device: an ancient weapon that produces a fusion reaction along a beam of energy it fires. If the beam strikes even a pebble, a hydrogen-bomb-sized blast results—all the worse for the gun's user, if he's standing only a few yards from the target.

The psionic disintegrators of the old *Traveller* adventure *Twilight's Peak*, John Galt's static-electricity engine of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, the thought-controlled hypersonic interceptor in the movie *Firefox*, and the code-breaking chip from the movie *Sneakers* are other good examples of MacGuffins for science fiction campaigns.

In each case, the MacGuffin would have a dramatic effect on civilization and the game campaign if released to the general public. Think about the Heechee artifacts in the Gateway novels by Frederik Pohl, or the ancient galactic fleet in David Brin's *Startide Rising*.

"Ordinary" technological devices will serve as MacGuffins if they have become very rare, in the manner that any manufactured item is valuable in the post-holocaust environment of the GAMMA WORLD® game.

The Last Submarine module trilogy for the *Twilight: 2000* game is a good example of this, and you might also wish to read Flora Lewis's nonfiction account of the loss of a nuclear weapon over Spain in her book, *One of Our H-Bombs is Missing*. To a sufficiently low-tech or impoverished culture, virtually any device could be a MacGuffin (for a scenario, see L. Sprague de Camp's short story "Finished," found in *The Continent Makers and Other Tales of the Viagens.*)

The worst way to run a MacGuffin Hunt is to give out all the clues to the item in the first adventure, then spend the second adventure (or, even worse, the first) hunting for and finding the object. What fun is that? You have to draw out the suspense and wring every drop of horror, thrills, terror, sweat, and blood out of the quest. The PCs might go through the first few game sessions knowing nothing about the MacGuffin, being involved in a sort of prequel adventure. Next they find out there is a MacGuffin and it has something to do with one or more of their past exploits.

In a related vein, TSR's old "giant-drow-Abyss" modules for the AD&D game didn't have the PCs start out hunting for Lolth, Queen of the Spiders. They started out fighting giants who

were led by other giants who were led by a drow who was led by other drow who were led by Lolth, with lots of other critters and subplots thrown in along the way. It took seven modules just to figure out who was screwing up the PCs' homeland!

Examples of MacGuffin Hunts in science fiction games are many. GDW's *Traveller* game in particular had a number of adventures revolving around the discoveries of eon-old artifacts created by a mysterious race of beings called the Ancients. The excellent module *Twilight's Peak*, which involved a long-playing search for a group of lost starships that might have uncovered an Ancients' base, provided the basis for a prolonged set-up to be run before the main adventure.

The adventurers could pick up rumors of the lost starships, talk to people who claimed to know something about the ships, investigate computer files about the incident, and so on—all while taking part in other missions unrelated to the main event. Eventually, the PCs discover the last few clues they need to find the fabled Twilight's Peak—and upon arriving there descend into an archeological nightmare that will quickly run beyond their control (the overwhelming opposition is a bit of a problem, as the PCs might survive only at the GM's whim unless they are very heavily armed, very diplomatic, and very careful). This adventure had a second theme, that of an impending war between the Imperium and the Zhodani Consulate, and this was reflected in the action as well, much to the PCs' dismay.

Twilight's Peak, however, was itself only the prequel to an even more mind-bending encounter, detailed in the adventure, *Secret of the Ancients*. There, the PCs discover what really happened to the Ancients and who they were, as well as how the Ancients manipulated prehistoric Humaniti and other races to their own ends. Anyone who thought that *Twilight's Peak* was overwhelming obviously never played in this module, the details of which I won't discuss right now. With the other published adventures that had the Ancients theme, quite a long *Traveller* campaign could be organized with these two modules as its core. Indiana Jones would be proud.

A particular problem with MacGuffin Hunts appears once the PCs have found the MacGuffin. Will the device/object/being unbalance the campaign? Do you really want the PCs to get a weapon that could blow up a planet at the touch of a button, or instantly transport them across the universe, or mind-control billions of sentient beings at once?

Probably not.

Make sure the MacGuffin has built-in limitations: only a few uses before it breaks down, harmful side effects on the user, enormous power requirements, not quite the effect that was expected, etc. The interceptor in *Firefox* responded only to thoughts in Russian; the code-breaking chip in *Sneakers* worked only on American codes; a lost atomic weapon could be leaking radiation; and so on. You should spend some time working on this issue to prevent your campaign from flying apart thanks to immortal PC demigods, the bane of many a fantasy campaign.

If nothing else, the PCs might turn their device over to a friendly government and be credited with the next revolution in science and technology—which will take place beyond the scope of the campaign in order to preserve it.

One way to prolong a MacGuffin Hunt is to require the PCs to find and assemble the component parts of the MacGuffin to make it work. You could call this the *Rod of Seven Parts* campaign, after the fabled artifact from TSR's AD&D game. This does sound a bit contrived, but if you're clever you could come up with a good reason as to why the original item was broken up or taken apart, with its pieces scattered.

Perhaps, after many adventures, the PCs find an ancient starship that has been damaged over the eons. If they can repair it, it might be capable of intergalactic travel. The PCs must secretly go to various locations throughout space to find ancient artifacts from the extinct civilization that built the starship, hoping that some of these artifacts will be useful as replacement parts on the ship. The heroes might also try to buy or commission the making of replacement parts from high-tech firms in different star systems.

Completing this two-part MacGuffin Hunt—first to find, then to repair the ship—will lead shortly to a campaign of exploration, assuming the GM is prepared for it (see the section on "big ship" campaigns in next month's column).

Last note: After some thought, I suppose you *could* design a long MacGuffin Hunt in which the PCs find the MacGuffin right off the bat—but they can't use it, understand it, or keep it from blowing up things. They must go on a prolonged mission to find its instructions and purpose. This is much like immediately getting the fabled *Rod of Seven Parts* in the AD&D game, but catching all its curses as well as its benefits, eventually forcing the PCs deciding to find some way to destroy or get rid of it now that they have it! A MacGuffin that grants unlimited power but in unwanted ways would eventually cause the PCs to hate and fear it—all the better for their next quest!

MacGuffin Hunt: Rescue/Capture

When I was a kid, one of my favorite movies was Walt Disney's *In Search of the Castaways*. A group of plucky adventurers sets out in search of the missing father of two of the children in the group, encountering the most incredible dangers you could imagine in the process. (Rent this as a video and see what wonderful ideas you get for tormenting your players with natural disasters.) The father, of course, is a MacGuffin—and so are the missing fathers in Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* and the movie *Iron Eagle*, the missing daughter in the movie *Commando*, the captured Americans in *Rambo II* and *Rambo III*, and the President in *Escape From New York*.

People make wonderful MacGuffins, mostly because they aren't predictable and they can move around on their own. They are also more difficult to handle when you rescue them; you generally can't stuff a person into your jacket pocket as you make your escape from a prison camp. Finally, as shown in many of the previous examples, the rescuers might have great emotional attachments to the kidnapped or lost person, which will really drive the story for the players in a role playing game.

Rescue missions, however, aren't the only ways to set up people-oriented MacGuffin Hunts. Bounty hunters, detectives, police officers, assassins, vigilantes, and espionage or commando "extraction" teams seek their quarry, too. Think here of the movies *Blade Runner, Lethal Weapon* (all three movies), *The Silence of the Lambs, 48 Hours, The Atomic City, Red Heat, The Delta Force, Black Sunday, Passenger 57, The Terminator, Terminator 2: Judgment Day, Split Second, The Eagle Has Landed, The Day of the Jackal, Apocalypse Now*, and many of the "Mission: Impossible" TV episodes you've seen on reruns.

Han Solo himself was tracked down by bounty hunters in the second *Star Wars* film. The person hunted might be a serial killer, a master thief, a political terrorist, a religious fanatic, a clever spy, a hired assassin, a downed pilot, a mad scientist, or a renegade robot or cyborg.

David Drake's novel *Killer* is about a murderous alien captured in Roman Empire times and being tracked upon its escape by a Roman detective. (Of course, an alien might not be harmful at all, as in the film *E.T.*)

Stretching the theme a bit, you could include other sorts of living things here, like the protagonists of *The Plague Dogs,* by Richard Adams, or *Sirius,* by Olaf Stapledon. Also note that the player characters could easily become the victims, as in the movie *Three Days of the Condor*.

I think it is harder to construct a long-term campaign around a living MacGuffin than a relic, but that's not necessarily so. If the PCs are hunting down members of a criminal or espionage ring, the campaign could be quite prolonged.

GAMMA WORLD game PCs might wish to track down the members of the local Knights of Genetic Purity or Red Death, for instance, with each adventure focusing on the capture or slaying of a different member or branch of those groups. Capturing foes alive is usually more challenging than killing them, allowing for the foes to be brought to trial (and perhaps later to escape).

MacGuffin Hunts: Treasure!

Did you ever read Robert Lewis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*? Did you ever watch *Romancing the Stone, Cliffhanger, The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, or *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*? Funny what a pile of yellow coins or green paper will do to a person, isn't it?

If the characters aren't outright criminals, you can avoid bandit scenarios such as those in *The Wild Bunch, Hudson Hawke, The Great Train Robbery, Assault on a Queen,* or *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, opting instead for a high-adventure quest to recover someone else's stolen valuables from a criminal gang. (True, repeating a *Kelly's Heroes* routine is rather tempting; American and German personnel did conspire at the end of World War II to rob the Nazi government's bank, taking the staggering amount of *three billion dollars*—and they got away with it!)

Perhaps the treasure has been seized or stolen by an invading army, bandits, thieves, or the like, and the heroes are merely going to return it to its rightful owner. Characters might be like Indiana Jones, taking lost treasures for scientific study, or they might be looking for money to finance other plans they have for the future. They might even be looking for fame as the ones who tracked down the missing fortune of a wiped-out criminal empire or extinct colony.

Knowledge is itself a treasure-type MacGuffin. Glassblowing and silk-making were state secrets in the Middle Ages, and the technique for making Damascus steel swords was similarly valued and hidden from foreign spies. The translation of a stone tablet, the formula for building a poison-gas bomb, the name of a double agent, or the statistical data needed to locate and operate a satellite could all serve as plot-drivers for long-playing adventures (think of the novel or movie *Ice Station Zebra*).

In the movie and novel *On the Beach*, the MacGuffin hunted for was the source of mysterious telegraph transmissions in the lifeless ruins of the United States following an atomic war. In the *Twilight: 2000* module *Satellite Down*, the information needed is contained in a crashed satellite whose photos and data will help the post-atomic government of America predict future weather patterns. (See earlier notes in "MacGuffin Hunts: The Relic" for more ideas.)

Getting the player characters involved in a treasure hunt is very easy. Stretching out the adventure into a prolonged campaign is also very easy, as the PCs are unlikely to be the only ones hunting for such valuable items. Think of all the trouble Indiana Jones had in getting a single statuette at the start of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and you'll be on the right track.

Next month, Part 2 presents even more epic campaign themes for your science fiction role playing game. See you then. ❑

The Heart of Evil

A Faerie, Queen, And Country Adventure

Transcribed by William W. Connors

Part Two

Wherein the investigation continues and Watson encounters the Great Beast

For the second night in succession, I arrived at Baker Street after our landlady had retired. To my surprise, I found that the note from Lestrade was still where I had left it. Further, I could see that nothing in the room had been disturbed and that the door to Holmes's bedroom was still open. Clearly, he had not returned from whatever errand had called him away that morning.

Resolving to see to it that the importance of Lestrade's note was fully impressed upon him, I decided not to retire until he returned.

Just as I seated myself and reached for my pipe and tobacco, the door swung open and Holmes stepped in. With a look of great fatigue, he carried his tall, angular body to the chair opposite mine in the parlor and fairly collapsed into it. I was about to welcome him and draw his attention to the note from Lestrade when he spoke:

"What a day I have had," he sighed.

"As have I," I said. My eagerness to tell him of my adventure must have shown.

"Indeed. I see that you have been practicing the art of deduction yourself—and in a most grisly place, at that. I trust Lestrade appreciated your helping him in my absence."

I was shocked, at first, by the comments of my companion. After a moment, however, I was able to see some of his thought processes.

"I understand," said I, "that you were able to determine that I have been involved in an investigation from the grass stains on my trouser knees and elbows. Further, I see that you could recognize the horrible nature of the case from the dried blood stains on my shoes. But how did you know that it was Lestrade who was overseeing matters and not Gregson or some other official?"

Holmes reached for his own pipe. Filling the bowl and tamping down the blend. He stretched back in his chair and smiled. "You are doing well, Watson. When we first met you would have professed astonishment at those rudimentary deductions. Now, you dismiss two-thirds of them as trivial. The last, which amazes you so much, was easy enough, for the handwriting on the note behind you spells out the nature of the summons quite clearly."

I was so amused by the simplicity of this deduction that I chuckled while we both lit our pipes. This momentary distraction was, however, fleeting, for my mind quickly returned to the dark business that had occupied my day.

As I began to recount my story, Holmes seemed only politely interested. Upon learning the name of the murdered man, however, he leaned forward and fixed his steady gaze upon me. With my every word, Holmes seemed more and more intense. By the time I had completed the narrative, his face was set with determination.

Holmes stood up, his smoldering pipe forgotten in his hand, and began to pace slowly about the room. "Your story is a most excellent one, Watson. You have drawn much truth from a tangled and twisted scene. I dare say that I might have fared only marginally better myself. At this rate, it will not be long before I must begin chronicling your adventures."

I felt a rush of pride at these words. Holmes was not a man who freely gave such compliments, and I felt that I had certainly done well in my investigations. Holmes interrupted my momentary joy, however, with a question about my researches.

"What manner of beast was it that attacked Mister Lawson before he was killed?"

"A dog, I should say."

"Yes, of course," he mumbled, "but what sort of dog?

"A large one, certainly, perhaps a shepherd or a mastiff," I responded, feeling now that I must have missed some important point.

"The two leave markedly different impressions when they bite, Watson. Can you not tell me the breed of dog involved?"

I admitted that I could not. Holmes seemed very upset by this confession, but soon let the matter drop. He again praised my work, but the pride that I had felt before was now diminished by my obvious shortcomings as a detective.

For a moment, our chambers fell into a moody silence. Then, with a sudden sparkle in his eyes, he resumed our conversation.

"Because you have been so good as to share with me the events of your day, Watson, it would be unfair for me to do less. Indeed, it seems that we have both been employed upon the same case, although from different aspects. As you have done an admirable job on your own end, I shall let you in on the things that I know. Perhaps we will find this exchange most illuminating."

I was shocked by Holmes's assertion that he, too, had been investigating the Abbeywood Murder. So far as I had known, my account of the matter had been his first introduction to it. Still, when one shares lodgings with someone as singular as Mr. Sherlock Holmes, one learns to expect the most unusual turns of fate. I bade him continue and settled back in my own chair to listen to his narrative.

"My day began regularly enough, Watson. I awoke somewhat earlier than is my norm. This insufferable heat made sleep difficult for me, and I set about a review of the morning's *Telegraph*. After cursory examination of several pieces of minor importance, I hit upon a most fascinating story. I am sure that you will see at once its connection to your own investigation." So saying, he reached into his pocket and produced a small piece of folded newsprint. He handed it to me and I read:

Egyptian Expedition Halted Prematurely

Series of Murders Forces Early Return of Archaeologists from Egyptian Digs.

The Royal Museum announced today that an archeological team headed by the well-known savant Dr. Victor Herring has returned from Egypt several weeks ahead of schedule. Although museum officials described their work as "exceptional" and reported that the quality of the

artifacts they had uncovered was unequalled, their investigations were hampered by a series of ghastly murders.

The killings started several weeks ago, shortly after the scientists began exploring a series of ruins said to date back to the third millennium BC.

Although the spokesman for the museum refused to give details on the crimes, this reporter has learned that they were all of a most horrible and violent nature. At least two members of the museum expedition, David Harrington and Alexander Lavaliere, have been lost—as have several of the native laborers. Indeed, in one case the victim's body was apparently doused in kerosine and set alight, making it impossible to identify. Further details of the killings will be published as they are uncovered.

The account went on for a few more paragraphs, discussing the nature of the relics that were being brought back for study and eventual display. There was no mention of Professor Lawson, but the conclusion that he had been a part of this ill-fated mission was unavoidable. Further, the fact that the fiend behind these crimes had made his way to England could not be denied.

"What can it all mean?" I asked.

"I cannot say, Watson. My attention was drawn to the case by the involvement of Professor Lavaliere. I had occasion to work with him in the past, for we shared some classes in my days at the university. He was a clever fellow with a turn for analytical thought. I pursued my own studies and he directed his attentions to the past. We soon found that we had, actually, too little in common to merit a lasting friendship.

"I was, as you might imagine, taken aback by this mention of his death, especially in so dramatic a fashion. Upon reading these reports, I took it upon myself to seek out Lavaliere's traveling companions and offer my services. It seemed the least that I could do."

Holmes paused momentarily to rekindle his pipe. I could certainly understand his desire to look into this affair.

Exhaling a cloud of thick, sweet smoke, Holmes leaned forward and appeared to be about to return to his narrative. Instead, he sank into a sullen silence that lasted for several minutes. When he spoke again, his voice came softly, almost a whisper.

"I believe, Watson, that we must return to the museum on the morrow. The new information that your narrative has presented makes such a trip imperative."

Early the next morning we hailed a cab and made our way to the Royal Museum. When I commented that the facility was certainly closed at so tender an hour, Holmes assured me that he had made arrangements.

A young woman of slight build with clear and beautiful nordic features greeted us outside the main entrance. Holmes introduced her as Miss Marilyn Charteris, the late Professor Lawson's personal assistant. After a brief exchange of pleasantries, she turned and unlocked the main door with a tarnished pass key. We entered, and she secured the portal behind us.

Miss Charteris announced that professor Sanderson, head of the museum's archeological department was waiting. She led us through a number of display rooms, the glory and grandeur of which I had forgotten since my last visit to the place some years before.

In a way, the museum reminded me greatly of Abbeywood. It seemed that every bit of the place was decorated with some ancient relic brought to England from the far and distant reaches of the British Empire. In a more festive mood, I would certainly have been enthralled by the place. At the moment, however, each and every object seemed to carry the taint of Lawson's death. I half expected to see his mutilated body each time we turned a corner or entered a new room. The dim lighting of the closed museum did nothing but enhance the feeling of uneasiness that dominated my spirit.

In short order, we descended a narrow flight of stairs and entered a collection of offices and laboratories beneath the museum proper. Here and there, an early bird was hard at work in an effort to restore, identify, or study some relic. The vast majority of the objects being worked on seemed to be of Egyptian origin, no doubt the spoils of Lawson's own ill-fated expedition.

We entered an area of crates and boxes, all marked as carrying delicate and important objects. A tall man, slightly less than Holmes's six feet, but rather above my own, moved to greet us. Holmes introduced him as Sanderson and we shook hands casually. He professed a pleasure at meeting me, and like Dougherty he assured me that he was an avid reader of my accounts of Sherlock Holmes's exploits.

As Holmes explained the purpose of our visit, my eyes drifted casually around the room. Miss Charteris, having seen her charges delivered to their destination, had vanished to resume her normal duties. My attention was drawn to a young man who was in the process of extracting several fragile-looking objects from the crate of straw in which they had been packed.

As Holmes was still in the most preliminary stages of inquiry, I stepped closer to the lad and took a good look at the items as he placed them on a wheeled cart. The things seemed an odd collection of knives, saws, and similar things. There was something familiar about them, but I could not say what it was. The young man noticed my attention and smiled.

"Do you have an interest in archeology, Dr. Watson?" he asked.

"No more so than the typical patron might," I responded. "But there is something most fascinating about these objects. What are they?"

"Well, that's a little hard to say. I don't think anyone has identified them yet. They were found in what looked like a temple room or burial chamber."

As he spoke, he drew out a long, slender knife and recognition came upon me. I smiled at the slowness of my wit and looked again at the objects. Their purpose was unmistakable now.

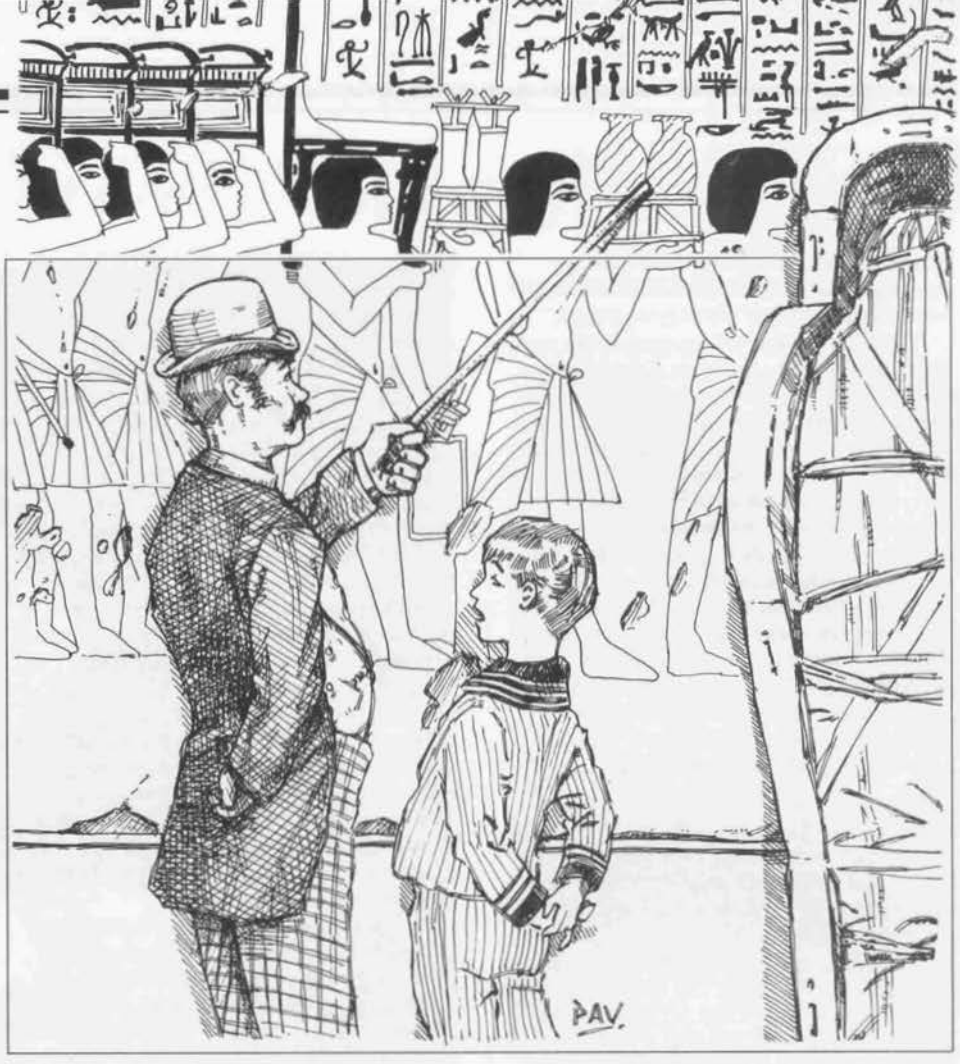
"These are medical instruments," I announced. "They are quite crude, but clearly the ancestors of modern surgical equipment."

The lad smiled again. He had a young, but intelligent face and a grin that seemed to bring a remarkable light his brown eyes. "Perhaps you ought to reconsider your interest in archeology."

I shared a brief laugh with the young man and then turned to rejoin Holmes and Sanderson. To my surprise, I found they had left. I asked the young fellow where they might have gone, and he pointed me toward a long hall set with doors. "Mr. Sanderson has the office at the end of that corridor," he said, "they probably retired there to be more comfortable." I agreed and headed that way, thanking him for the assistance.

The hall was narrow, perhaps wide enough for two people to walk abreast, but no more than that. The lighting was harsh, giving one the impression of a prison or asylum.

I had not gone half the length of the hall when my attention was drawn to something on the floor. As I passed a door marked "Kollsman," I noticed a thin stream of thick crimson liquid trickling into the corridor. At first, I



assumed that it must be a chemical of some kind or ink from an overturned container. As I knelt to look more closely at it, the tell-tale smell of iron reached my nostrils. The unusual lighting of the hallway prevented me from instantly recognizing it as blood. But now a horror gripped me.

I sprang to my feet and tried the door. It was locked, but a second such blow and the door swung open, revealing a scene more horrible than that at Abbeywood.

The body of a man lay across a cluttered desk. His arms swung wildly, and his hands twitched as if he were trying to grab something. His chest was torn open and the ribs pried. I saw at once a surgical knife nearby, the twin of the surgical piece that I had seen in the previous room. Blood from the wound had left the floor slick with a wash of scarlet, the leading edge of which had drawn my attention.

As horrible as all this was, I found myself frozen by the terror that seemed to be the root of this nightmare. Standing atop the body, its muzzle buried in the man, was a great black dog. Its coat was thick and tenebrous, seeming to be the very essence of darkness and evil.

In the few seconds of stunned disgust that I stood in the doorway, the creature lifted its head.

Just as I recovered my wits, the creature sprang upon me. The impact of the great beast knocked me off balance, causing my feet to slip in the spreading pool of blood. I went down hard, giving a cry of alarm just before I struck the floor and lost my breath.

The next second seemed to last a fortnight. The canine face, stained with blood, was scant inches from my own. The eyes of the beast, as black and evil as its coat, burned down. The beating of my own heart seemed to fill my ears. A terrible aching began in my chest as that pounding became a rapid and frantic roar. I feared that I might be in the throws of cardiac arrest.

Then, as quickly as it had sprang upon me, the beast vaulted away. Holmes and Sanderson charged into the hallway from the far end, and the young assistant appeared at the opening to the storage room. The dog charged the latter, who gave ground to the horrible menace and then rushed to my side after it had passed.

The pain in my chest faded slowly, and I closed my eyes for a moment of rest. When I tried to open them again, I found that I could not.

When next I awoke, it was to the hawk-like face of Sherlock Holmes. He knelt over me, holding my hand with a tenderness that I should not have believed possible in the stern and logical man. I began to speak, but found myself unable to give breath to my words.

"Lie silent," said Holmes. "You have been unconscious for some minutes. All is well." He waved to someone I couldn't see, and a flask was handed to him. He eased it to my lips. The sweet taste of brandy was more refreshing than I can describe, and I could feel the life flowing back into my flesh.

My strength returned quickly, though not with nearly as much vigor as it might have some years before. As I sat up, sipping at the precious brandy, Holmes laid a hand on my shoulder and favored me with a wry smile.

"Well, Watson, it seems you were wrong about the existence of a great dog."

"What do you mean?" I cried. "Did you not see the thing? I watched as it consumed the heart of that poor fellow!"

"Easy," he chuckled. "I meant nothing of the sort. That beast was real enough, certainly. You will notice that its claws have torn the fabric of your rather expensive jacket. I was merely pointing out that the creature was no mundane dog. Far from it, Watson, that beast was a monstrous jackal."

"A jackal!" I cried. The energy that I expended was enough to cause my vision to blur momentarily, but Holmes was ready again with the brandy. "But how can that be? Has such a creature escaped from the zoo or been brought back from Africa by the expedition?"

"Not so far as I have been able to determine." said Holmes. "Sanderson denies that the expedition claimed anything but archeological spoils on its travels. As for the zoo, I have not yet investigated that possibility, but I think that such an instance is unlikely. I have sent for the police and discharged a number of men to search for the animal. But I suspect that they will find no trace of it. No, there is something special about that creature, and I dare say that we have not seen the last of it."

With that, Holmes and Sanderson took hold of my arms and helped me to regain my feet. My companion stated that he had not begun his investigation of the beast's gruesome work, but that he was eager to do so. I announced my desire to join him, and we moved slowly into that horrible room.

The familiarity of the scene was terrible. Everywhere was the spattered blood and mangled flesh that had

marked the killing of poor Lawson. The air was heavy with the smell of ichor.

Holmes stepped quickly to the corpse, examining it with the same determination that I had forced upon myself when studying the body at Abbeywood. His face seemed drawn and pale, unlike I have ever seen it, and I saw that even his rock steady hands trembled slightly as he examined the ghastly weapon.

At last, Holmes signaled for a canvas and draped it across the body. He had learned all that he could from the murdered man and saw no reason to expose the fellow's associates to the abhorrent sight that we had forced ourselves to endure. When this was done, he called for Sanderson.

"I notice," Holmes began, "that Kollsman was working with a most singular artifact. Can you tell me something of it?"

Sanderson, showing more courage than I would have given him credit for, stepped into the room and picked up a stone plate from the edge of the desk. It was partially covered by the tarp that we had drawn across the body, but slid free readily enough. The tablet was roughly a foot wide by eighteen inches long. Its face was decorated with the crude pictograms that I knew to be the language of ancient Egypt. Seeming to pay no attention to the blood that had filled some of the engraved channels on the object, Sanderson brought it into the hall.

"Yes." he said, handing the artifact to Holmes. "The expedition found two of these in what was probably a funereal temple. Because of the curious nature of the temple, Kollsman was attempting to decipher these hieroglyphs and see what we might learn from them."

"What exactly was so curious about the temple?" asked Holmes, with a look of mild interest in his eyes.

"The structure seems to have been built and then sealed off without having been used. The Egyptians were fascinated by death and the promise of an afterlife, Mr. Holmes. It seemed most odd to the members of the expedition that so ornate and elaborate a complex should be built and then abandoned."

"What of the other plate?" Holmes asked. "You said that there were two, but I saw only one in Kollsman's office."

"Professor Lawson had custody of the other one. I believe he took it home to attempt its decryption."

At this remark, Holmes spun swiftly to face me. "Watson, you made a most thorough study of the late Professor's home. Did you see any sign of such an artifact?"

I gave the matter a brief thought. Certainly, there was much debris and rubble scattered about the scene of the first murder, but I was certain that I had seen nothing like the object that Holmes now held. I said so, and Holmes nodded. "I thought as much."

Sanderson seemed suddenly to understand what Holmes was thinking. "Do you suspect that someone has murdered both these men to get the plates?"

"It seems not unlikely," responded Holmes. "We might logically assume that only the timely intervention of good Watson here prevented the fiend from laying his hands upon the one that was held by Kollsman."

"I don't believe it!" cried Sanderson. "Certainly as archeological pieces, these two items are quite valuable. But in simple monetary terms, they are hardly of merit. No thief could think their value great enough to kill for."

"Perhaps they have some hidden importance that we can only guess at." Holmes responded. His remark left both myself and Professor Sanderson somewhat confused, but he pressed on, giving us no chance to interrupt him.

"Would it be possible for me to take custody of this tablet for a few days?" Holmes asked. Sanderson looked somewhat taken aback by the request. "I am something of a cryptologist," my companion continued, "and I should like to make an effort at learning the hidden message of these glyphs."

Sanderson seemed about to refuse, but recognized that no finer mind could be brought to bear upon the puzzle of this alien language. He consented and ordered the young assistant to bring forward a wooden box and some packing straw to make the object ready for travel.

Just then, the door opened and in walked the lovely Miss Charteris and the sallow-faced Lestrade. The former smiled briefly at us and introduced the detective to Sanderson.

As the official investigation began, Holmes leaned near to me and whispered softly. "As soon as Lestrade has finished with his questions, may I ask you to carry that package back to Baker Street?"

"Certainly," I responded, "if that is what you want. But what do you plan to do?"

"I plan to wander the museum for a bit, particularly the Egyptian sections. It has been some time since my last visit here as a patron, and it may be that the atmosphere of the place will shed some light on this dark matter."

Mr. Sherlock Holmes

Blood	Full human
Nationality	English
Social Class	Bourgeoisie
Profession	Detective
Contacts	8
Permanent	Scotland Yard
Permanent	The Underworld
Circumstance	
Monthly Wage	£150
Savings	£1200
Physique	**3**
Fitness	50
Reflexes	40
Intellect	**1**
Learning	95
Intuition	90
Spirit	**2**
Psyche	41
Willpower	39
Influence	**4**
Charm	38
Position	34
Stamina	16
Body	10

Skills
Pistol (Ref)
Disguise (Int)
Acting (Int)
Music, Violin (Int)
Bribery (Int)
Chemical Analysis (Lea)
Craniometry (Lea)
Handwriting Analysis (Int)
Material Analysis (Lea)
Phrenology (Lea)
Library Research (Lea)
Linguistics (Lea)
English (Lea)
French (Lea)
German (Lea)
First Aid (Int)

Remarks: One of the finest minds in England (or the world), Holmes earns his living as a consulting detective. Only his brother Mycroft and his arch enemy Professor Moriarty have minds equal to his.

Holmes shares lodgings at 221-B Baker Street with Dr. John Watson, who often joins him on his investigations and has taken the time to publish accounts of several of their greatest adventures in *The Strand*, a popular magazine. ❑

Into the Dark

More Hong Kong Chaos

by James Lowder

Two obstacles confront me every time I decide on a Chinese film to review for the column. The first is the obvious problem of where to find a copy of the blasted thing. The clerks at the local mega-chain tend to stare like deer caught in a semi's headlights whenever I ask if they intend to stock *Wolf Devil Woman* or *Thrilling Bloody Sword.* (Actually, most of the veteran video pushers in the local chainstores know enough to bolt whenever I drop by. It's the unknowing neophytes who usually get stuck dealing with me. Heh heh.)

As I mentioned last month, you might be able to hunt these sorts of videos down if you live near a city with a large Asian population. Otherwise, it's mail order or nothing. Me? I got the films reviewed this month from Video Search of Miami (write to P.O. Box 16-1917; Miami, FL 33116 for a catalog). You'll also want to drop a line to Erik Sulev of White Dragon Video, 46 Tweedrock Crescent, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada M1E 4L5.

Once I've obtained a copy of, say, *Savior of the Soul,* I run face-first into another problem: the language barrier. Even when video companies bother to subtitle Asian films, they often do a downright atrocious job. (You'd be amazed at how much one strategically placed wrong name or a goofed personal pronoun in a subtitle can confuse a plot beyond all reason.) Worse still, some flicks were subtitled for the big screen and many of the videos aren't letterboxed. It's a ball to guess at the first and seventh word of every line of dialogue.

Still, once you've watched a few of these tapes, it's fairly easy to fill in the missing words and muddle through bad subtitles. That leaves the frequently insurmountable barrier of untranslated credits. And you won't find Roger Ebert or Leonard Maltin discussing *A Chinese Ghost Story* in their review guides either. Thankfully, a few stalwart publications like *Asian Trash Cinema* and *Monster International* do their best to provide as much reference data as possible about these films.

It's a good thing these movies are so cool, 'cause I would certainly feel ripped off if I went to all this trouble to watch *Hard Rock Zombies* or *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves!*

As always, the films reviewed here are rated as follows:

You can't get any better	*****
Entertaining and enjoyable	****
There are worse films	***
Wait for cable	**
A waste of good tape	*

Peacock King

1988, 82 Minutes
Golden Harvest
Director: Nam Nai-Choi
Cast: Yuen Biao
*****1/2**

Yuen Biao, the popular star of this ambitious film, is known in Hong Kong film circles as one of the Three Brothers. That explains why *Peacock King* is so full of references to the other two "brothers," superstars Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan.

The four gates to hell are opening one by one in preparation for the Hell King's escape. But the heroic monks Peacock (Yuen Biao) and Lucky Fruit have taken on the monumental task of thwarting his plans and defeating his minions, Raga the Hell Agent and Ashura the Hell Virgin (sounds like the date I took to my senior prom). The monks, along with a really annoying woman named Miss Okada, travel from modern day Tokyo to Hong Kong to Tibet, trying to close the hellgates as soon as they open.

Along the way, Peacock and Lucky Fruit battle imps, possessed dinosaurs from a department store display, and a mundane assassin or two for good measure. Miss Okada just screeches a lot and gets in the way. We're offered intrigue, bloodshed, and even a romance between Peacock and the Hell Virgin (who doesn't mean to fry people with those fireballs that shoot from her eyes. Really).

Magic flies fast and furious throughout the story, but two battles stand out as especially noteworthy. In the first, the Hell Agent transforms into an Aliens-inspired creature with taloned arms that can shoot across a room and a fanged mouth that runs from her chin to the nape of her neck. The second features the Hell King himself, who resembles a more mobile version of the devil from the "Night on Bald Mountain" segment of Disney's *Fantasia.* Spiffy sequences, though both fights suffer from frustratingly poor lighting.

The concept for *Peacock King* and a few of the fight scenes are first rate, but the film bogs down too often in silly subplots propelled by ridiculous coincidences. Even the final battle with Hell King is delayed for a long and very cliched kung-fu brawl between Peacock and the assassins who killed his master. If you can stick it out through the sappy bits and Miss Okada's whining, you'll probably find the rest of *Peacock King* worth the effort.

The story of Peacock continues in the sequel, *Saga of the Phoenix.*

Zu: Warriors from Magic Mountain

1982, 93 Minutes
Rainbow
Director: Tsui Hark
Cast: Yuen Biao
****

Writer-producer-director and all around *wunderkin* Tsui Hark makes interesting films. But like his Hollywood counterpart, Steven Spielberg, Tsui has yet to learn that more is not necessarily better, so many of his films end up as experiments in excess—visually stunning but horribly overplotted.

Zu: Warriors from Magic Mountain starts out with all the standard strengths of a Tsui Hark film—exhilarating fight sequences, fast cuts, and unusual camera angles. It also benefits from a relatively simple plot. Well, it starts out simple anyway.

Ti—played by Yuen Biao of *Peacock King* fame—deserts from one of the multitudinous armies battling it out for control of the mountain overlooking 10th century Szechuan. After some amusing attempts to escape from various rival armies, he stumbles across a temple in the mountains, hooks up with a heroic swordsman/monk, and becomes

embroiled in a battle against the nasty Blood Monster and his minions, the Evil Disciples.

Clear enough, right? By the midpoint of *Zu: Warriors*, however, things become so convoluted that it'll take two or three careful viewings to sort out all the subplots. First Ti heads off to Fort Ice, intent on finding a cure for an ally who's been poisoned by Blood Monster. Then Ti's master gets possessed by a witch. Oh yeah, and a Gandalf-type wizard sends Ti to find Wonder Girl Li I-Chi, who has two magic swords that the heroes need to defeat the baddie....

Once you get all these myriad plot threads separated, however, you'll find *Zu: Warriors* quite a thrilling film. Blood Monster wields a sword of lightning. The old wizard catches a meteor-like soul with his incredibly long eyebrows. (He's not a mutant; such eyebrows were a sign of great wisdom in ancient China.) Boulders the size of minivans get tossed around in a battle on the border between the realms of Law and Chaos. These scenes alone are guaranteed to leave you gaping in stunned amazement.

Both Tsui Hark and Sammo Hung have cameos as soldiers in the big skirmishes that open and close the film. If you can spot them on your own, you've probably seen too many of these films.

Swordsman

1990, 117 Minutes
Film Workshop/Long Shong
Director: King Hu
Cast: Sam Hui, Cecilia Yip, Jacky Cheung
*****1/2**

Though King Hu is given directoral credit for *Swordsman*, it's generally believed that six directors had a hand in piloting the film: King Hu, Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, Ching Siu Tung, Lee Wai Man, and Kam Yeung Wah. The final product shows the scars that only multiple directors can leave. Unsurprisingly, Tsui Hark left the most noticeable marks on the film.

A somewhat typical release from Tsui's Film Workshop, *Swordsman* is a visually arresting film burdened with a ponderous and overripe story. As with *Zu: Warriors*, the premise is simple enough: a mystic scroll (the Sacred Volume) is stolen from the library of the Forbidden City. The keepers of the library set out in search of the scroll, but the focus quickly shifts to Ling Wu (Sam Hui), a swordsman from the Wah Mountains. Ling soon finds himself part of a bewildering tapestry of plotting and counterplotting, court intrigue, and outlaw smugglers in Ming Dynasty China.

Spectacular fights mark *Swordsman's* last half hour, battles that feature whip-wielding smuggler queens, a woman who shoots snakes out of her sleeves, and the sort of flying about and hacking on each other with swords you'll come to expect if you watch enough Hong Kong cinema. To get to these epic battles, though, you've got to wade through an hour of episodic storytelling and repetitious musical interludes that will almost certainly have your thumb poised over the fast forward button.

Swordsman was successful enough to spawn a couple of sequels, though they were directed for the Film Workshop by only one guy—Ching Siu Tung of the superb *Chinese Ghost Story* series.

Witch from Nepal

1985, 85 Minutes
Paragon
Director: Chin Ching Lo
Cast: Emily Chu, Chow Yun-fat
****

Discovering the work of new actors and actresses is one of my favorite things about watching foreign films. The films of Kurosawa introduced me to such Japanese stars as Takashi Shimura (who headlined both *The Seven Samurai* and the original *Godzilla*) and Toshiro Mifune, who ranks in many circles as one of the greatest actors of all time. *Witch from Nepal* features a Chinese actor I've come to enjoy quite a lot: Chow Yun-fat.

Those of you who have rented John Woo's stellar "ammunition epic" *The Killer* from your local video mega-store will recognize Chow Yun-fat as the tough hitman. He's played similar parts in many of Woo's films, though his performances in *The Killer* and *A Better Tomorrow* outshine most of his other gangster work.

In *Witch from Nepal*, Chow plays a very different role: Joe Wong, a commercial artist who turns out to be the next leader of a Nepalese temple. After being alerted to his destiny by the witch Sheila (Emily Chu), Joe becomes the reluctant defender of the temple and does battle with the feral, super-powered baddie who's after their religious treasures.

Much of *Witch from Nepal* is spent on very familiar territory, even to American audiences. The sudden appearance of Sheila, and her resulting relationship with Joe, sort of annoys Joe's steady girlfriend. The resulting love triangle is as traditional as it is tedious. Oh, a few sequences manage to capture some true sparks of romance, but mostly the story is spinning its wheels in these scenes until the next burst of action.

When those rare non-romance moments finally arrive, they're quite well-done. The scene wherein Sheila first shows Joe that he no longer needs to use the stairs to get down from atop a four-story hospital is handled perfectly. Other high points include a creepy battle against western-style zombies in a graveyard and the rock 'em, sock 'em final confrontation between Joe and the cat devil.

If the romance was a little more convincing and a lot less cliched, *Witch from Nepal* would be a fine film. As is, it seems like Chow Yun-fat was really only killing time here until he could move on to meatier roles, and director Chin Ching Lo (aka Ching Siu Tung) was honing his skills for the much more original supernatural romance, *A Chinese Ghost Story*.

Everwinking Eye

Continued from page 4

been destroyed. Since those days, several brigand treasures have been found near Fallentree. Usually, there is just a chest or a few rotting sacks crammed with an assortment of coins. Most of these caches were buried at the bases of old pine trees. One larger cache included an entire wagon with its load of silver trade-bars. The vehicle was buried whole with its dead guards, who had been transformed into undead skeletons to guard the treasure.

Local legend holds that an ancient temple to Garagos the War God is located in a cavern under one of the cottages in the village. The temple is said to be adorned with magical weapons gathered by cultists from all over the Realms, and that the fallen battle god still is worshipped there. The tale also warns that the devout can call upon spells that animate the collected weapons to defend the sanctuary.

The Fire River

This large, generally placid watercourse descends from the grassy plains of The High Country (where it may well figure in legends and treasures not covered here) and flows through the Vast. It empties into The Sea of Fallen Stars at Ravens Bluff. Many springs rise in the southern Vast to join it, and their sources are cloaked in thick stands of trees occupied by outlaws, treasures, and reclusive mages. More new and terrible spells have lashed down the Fire River valley than anywhere else in the Realms since the fall of Netheril.

Some of these wizards' secrets have died with them, including where their magic items and spell books are hidden. The oldest and most powerful mages have extra-dimensional residences. These places teem with helmed horrors, magical traps, and other guardians. Most also have gates linking them to other places in the Realms and to other planes.

There's also a smugglers' tale from the early days of Ravens Bluff. Barges of goods were often brought into the city by night from ships standing well out in the Reach. On one occasion there was treachery and an open battle with spells ensued on the docks. The barges hastily sculled away, retreating up the river. At least one barge sank, a victim of the darkness and hostile magic. The barge and its cargo—thousands of crated, newly-minted gold pieces—presumably still lies on the muddy river bottom.

Glorming Pass

This pass is wilder and less used than Elvenblood Pass. Most sages agree it is named for a local orc chieftain—a hero to his kind—who was killed there while fighting. Glorming Pass is still a dangerous place today. It carries The North Road between Dragon Falls and Sevenecho. It is the haunt of "The Phantom Knights," ghostly horsemen in full plate armor who gallop on spectral mounts. The sounds they make are real enough, and their closed helms turn to look at nearby living beings as they thunder by. But they do not harm anyone. Occasionally as they pass, they brush against someone, or ride right through a person. This contact causes a momentary chill, and the being touched glows with a pale blue *faerie fire* radiance for the next hour.

No one knows who the Knights are—or were. They ignore all magic and attempts to influence or control them. Their touch also causes all magical dweomers to glow a flickering ruby-red for one turn. This reveals hidden or disguised magic items, and it sometimes draws attention to magical treasure that has fallen by the roadside, usually on the bodies of people orcs have slain.

Orcs are numerous in the mountains around the pass. Sites for ambushes and deliberate rockfalls are far fewer than in Elvenblood Pass to the west. But the orc patrols are heavy, and monsters of all sorts are frequent.

At least one authority, Riliyyn Scantshar of Sevenecho, believes some evil power—perhaps a wizard, lich, or even an alhoon (or illithilich; detailed in the *Menzoberranzan* boxed set)—dwells in the peaks near the pass. Riliyyn speculates that this enigmatic being has placed a deepspawn (detailed in FR11/ Dwarves Deep and in the revised FORGOTTEN REALMS® boxed) in the area to generate monsters to discourage intruders. The being's hidden lair may house powerful magic.

Other sages accept the deepspawn theory, but suggest that it guards a fortress built around a gate leading to the demiplane of dread or other alien world.

Whatever the truth about Glorming Pass, the orcs who swarm in the mountains around it have taken a considerable amount of treasure from unfortunate travelers over the years. At least some must remain nearby in the orcs' cavernous lairs.

Highbank Forest

This wooded village is located where Feldar's Trail meets the Tantras Trail. Today Highbank Forest is a sleepy place best known for its skilled woodcarvers, who make furniture and toys of the finest quality and intricacy. The carvings of Highbank Forest are justly famous, and enterprising merchants buy them to sell to the wealthy all over the Realms.

Highbank Forest gets its name from a steep-sided wooded hill just to the north of the village proper; its flanks shelter the cottages of the village from the worst winter winds.

Ages ago, a keep stood atop the hill. This tower once was a wizards' school. Now it is a ruin overgrown with trees. A central shaft leads into the disused dungeon levels below. The villagers throw their garbage down it and warn the children not to play nearby. A huge gibbering mouther (detailed in the revised FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set) lurks at the bottom of shaft, waiting eagerly for anything that falls down.

The mouther is trapped in a large central room. There are three doors leading out, all sealed by *walls of force.*The areas beyond contain the spell books, half-finished magical items, wealth, spell components, and personal belongings of 11 apprentice wizards.

They were slain years ago by brigands, who lured the apprentices up into their keep and slew them one by one. In the process, the brigands released the mouther and perished at its hands as the last, dying wizard cast spells to bring the keep crashing down atop them all.

The villagers know nothing of the lost school of wizardry. As far as they are concerned, the keep belonged to a brigand who set himself up as a local ruler called "Lord Wolf." He preyed upon caravans for many years until the nearby cities of Ravens Bluff and Tantras hired an army to eliminate him.

Lord Wolf indeed existed, but not until after the school fell into ruin. He dwelt secretly in an outlying cottage, using the ruined keep only as a rallying place for his men before mounting his raids.

Our "treasure tour" of the Vast will continue in the next column. ❑